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AN  
E S S A Y  
ON THE  
EQUITY  
OF  
DIVINE GOVERNMENT,  
AND THE  
SOVEREIGNTY  
OF  
DIVINE GRACE.

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BY EDWARD WILLIAMS, D.D.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following notice was designed, by the lamented Author, to be prefixed to the volume now offered to the public. It sufficiently explains the causes of the numerous alterations which will be found in the present edition; and for this reason, as well as on account of the devotional spirit which is evinced, and which was so characteristic of the writer, it has been thought best to retain it, although some projects are announced, which now, alas! cannot be fully realized.

It may be proper to add, that the whole of the work, with the exception of the last six pages, and which are therefore printed verbatim from the corresponding parts

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of the former impression, was re-written and fully prepared for the press by the Author.

“ The first edition of this Essay has been as favourably received by the public as the Author had any reason to expect. Its general design being to establish the evidence of truth, on principles not commonly employed, it had to struggle with long established modes of thinking and of expression. Besides, as it had been written at very distant intervals of time, the composition, especially in the former part, had many disadvantages; and some peculiar modes of expression, however significant they appeared to the writer, were not sufficiently accommodating to the public ear. In this edition the Author has attempted an improvement in these respects. As he wishes to render the work useful to all classes of readers, he has omitted the more abstruse parts contained in the ‘ Notes and Illustrations,’ reserving the substance of them for a separate work, on ‘ The Principles of Moral Science;’ which he designs to publish, if life and health be afforded. Some of the long quotations from different authors, especially those which are easily accessible, are curtailed, a few redundancies are lopped off, and a consi-



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derable proportion of new matter is added. But, in order to make room for important additions, the professed Examination of Dr. WHITBY's Discourse on the Five Points, and of Mr. FLETCHER's Controversial Writings, is omitted. The work, in its present form, is complete without that Examination; which, if circumstances should appear to require it, may be the basis of a separate publication professedly on the subject, and the design of which would be to promote a better understanding and greater union among serious Christians. O, when shall it be, that a calm and candid investigation of principles will assume the place of precipitate rashness, sweeping conclusions, uncharitable recriminations, and a bigoted overrating of party phrases, to the neglect of accurate conception on subjects that so evidently require it!

“ On the whole, it is hoped, that this edition will be found more worthy of indulgence from the religious public, than the first. May the God of all grace influence the heart of every reader, that he may be profitably instructed and edified! May he be the happy subject of saving knowledge; of heavenly wisdom; of Christian

## ADVERTISEMENT.

candour; unfeigned faith; firm hope; and charity that never faileth! Should he find any thing in this volume inconsistent with the oracles of eternal truth, let him reject it; but let him be *sure* that he understands the subject before he gives a verdict."

JOHN HAWKSLEY.

London, May 24, 1813.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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IT is now more than twenty years since the Author of the following Essay was led to contemplate with peculiar attention, through the medium of the sacred writings, God's mediatorial covenant and its various dispensations. In the course of his enquiries, he could not but observe an evident *difference* between what may be denominated the internal form, and the outward administration of this merciful plan, as clearly implied in the whole tenor of divine revelation:—that, while the former is a decretive design of enriching those who are finally saved, with victorious grace and everlasting happiness, the latter is a benevolent exhibition of the good we need, by testimony, by proclamation, or by positive

institutions, under a conditional form, addressed to men as totally unrestrained in their elections:—and that each economy is conducted by a process worthy of infinite wisdom. He was thus unavoidably induced to view man as at once a passive receiver of ordained benefits, and a free agent; and the more accurately he weighed this distinction, the more completely he became satisfied of its great importance in relation both to the blessings we partake, and the account we must finally render of our conduct: since, throughout the sacred writings, human beings are represented, under one aspect, as endowed freely with various bounties,—as brought into life, preserved, renovated, and qualified to offer to the Lord acceptable service;—and, under another aspect, as possessed of active powers or faculties to which are proposed objects of choice,—good laws, gracious promises, and eternal felicity,—accompanied with awful threats of punishment to the disobedient.

On comparing these representations of scripture with the just principles of moral science, and finding them harmonious, the author was convinced that each might be successfully employed in the service of the other; that as the sacred oracles wonderfully illustrate scientific principles, so the latter might in return be made to confirm the reasonableness of revealed facts. This appeared to apply with peculiar force to the much controverted doctrines of *liberty* and *necessity*; and these litigated subjects, and the preceding views of man, being so intimately connected, he was led to attempt a more critical review of both.

In this pursuit, to which he was not a little animated by the importance of the probable result, he saw great reason to conclude, that the plan of redeeming grace, occupying a part so prominent and so ample in the sacred pages, is, in all its evolutions, a glorious object of decreative

necessity; and that the outward administration of that plan, occupying a part still more prominent and ample, is an important display of the doctrine of liberty. But since liberty and necessity had been commonly considered, by their respective advocates, as incompatible with each other, a new object of enquiry occurred,—Whether the scriptural doctrine of man being *at once*, under different aspects, both necessitated and free, be or be not philosophically accurate? Nor was it long before the affirmative of the question appeared obvious, and that on principles the most solid and satisfactory.

Since the uniform declarations and tenor of scripture (with which a few expressions of a different aspect are easily reconciled) regard man, when under the influence of decreative necessity, antecedently and irrespectively considered, as the subject of some *benefit*,—there appeared just cause for inferring, that such a necessity does not



include the sinfulness of moral acts. It is not admissible that the First Agent can be the source of all good and of all evil alike:—he can be the sovereign *cause* (as distinguished from an equitable avenger of demerit) of good only. Now the decrees of God are the expression of his *nature*, no less than of his will; and therefore the necessitating causation implied in them must be exclusively a good operation. Admitting the fact of a Being who is infinitely good and wise, his energies in creation and providence must be worthy of these perfections. Thus, particularly, all physical operations, the mechanism of the universe, the properties and laws of matter and motion, notwithstanding individuals are occasionally sufferers by their influence,—all these, are worthy of divine, voluntary, sovereign necessitation. Not only does the sum of beneficial effects, upon the whole, far exceed that of occasional suffering, but every operation of providence, without exception, is in itself

directly good; and the same remark is applicable to the world of minds, to the constitution of intelligent natures, and to the influence of which, in any respect, they are the subjects.

Here, however, a difficulty presented itself. Since good exclusively appears worthy of God's irrespective necessitation; while the conviction is forced upon us by the united testimony of common sense, of conscience, and of scripture, that there are in the world *evils* which God hates, and condemns; how could the futurity of those evils be pronounced *certain*, as it is so pronounced in the language of divine predictions? What plausible ground of their certainty remains, while a necessitating decree of them is rejected, as infinitely unworthy of the Supreme Governor? The author observed, that the advocates of philosophical necessity, by assuming false data, and too much neglecting the light afforded by divine revelation, are not a

little embarrassed on this head. Many of them, in their efforts to preserve self-consistency, throw down the main pillars of a moral system altogether, and deny even the possibility of moral evil. According to their doctrine, every thing, without exception or distinction, is of decretive necessity. This perhaps is not the exact epithet they would use; but if called philosophical, or metaphysical, the idea is yet precisely the same. He who maintains that the *defective manner* of a physical act of the will is included in the divine purpose and energy, must, in order to be consistent, conclude that man, (though he is the subject of innumerable associations, and all the result of circumstances) is *as much* impelled to the murderous villainy of his free act, as a dog is impelled, by his instinctive propensity and the will of his master, to worry a sheep, or to kill a hare. This, indeed, is the unavoidable consequence, on the assumed principle that all certainty flows from the

divine will and purpose, to the exclusion of a *negative* ground of certainty in moral actions. But the admission of the latter, properly applied, solves the difficulty at once;—and it was peculiarly gratifying to the writer of these pages to discover, that no principle in the whole range of science is capable of being more firmly established.

The author was aware, that there were many persons of great and deserved celebrity, who went little farther, than to ascribe to God the causation of good only, with a bare denial of his being the “Author of sin;” and who, when pressed with the question—how the certain futurity of denounced evil, proclaimed in the language of prophecy, and the divine causation of it, can be separated in a clear and satisfactory manner—were accustomed to return for answer, “Beware of going too far—we shall know it well in a future state.” After all, however, as it must confessedly

be a good and useful event to be well informed on this point in another world, there seems no sufficient reason why further information in the present, should be dreaded as remarkably dangerous. If some have been unprofitably perplexed in their researches, it by no means follows, that we are to regard the question as a speculative nicety, productive of small advantage, supposing it to be satisfactorily answered. It is on the contrary, in the humble judgment of the writer, one of primary importance, intimately connected with almost every branch of moral philosophy, and with the whole system of revelation respecting sin and grace. These topics of religion are founded in eternal truth ; and a clear perception of their sources is calculated both to delight the understanding, and invigorate the heart. The inspired oracles do not, perhaps, expressly state the ultimate source of sin, (and the same may be said of many other points of confessed importance;) but they afford ample evidence from



whence the conclusion may be deduced. They constantly maintain that GOD is the source of our good; and that we OURSELVES are the cause of our moral evil. The scattered rays of these primary truths are brought by the apostle James into a focus: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."\* Here we are plainly taught, that GOD is the origin of all good, so as to exclude the idea of his being the source of any moral evil; and, that the

\* James, i. 13—17.

origin of human moral evil is in MAN, so as to exclude every cause exterior to himself: from which two ideas, as will hereafter be shewn, it inevitably follows, that the origin of moral evil is a negative principle.

The scriptures also fully state an essential difference between the Creator and the creature; ascribing to the one, self-existence, independence, and all-sufficiency; to the other, a derived existence, absolutely dependant on the First Cause, and therefore without any sufficiency which is not communicated. And this is affirmed absolutely, as applying not less to all creatures, than to some; to creatures we do not know, than to those whom we *do* know. It matters not in what period, nor in what part of the universe they exist, or may exist; nor how excellent and exalted may be their nature or endowments. Grant that they are contingent, and not absolute beings,—created, or caused to exist by an uncaused agent,—and they are by that

very admission, as an essential consequence of their existence, stamped with limitation or comparative defect. By exalting their nature, and magnifying their powers, we only magnify and exalt the cause in whom they ‘live, move, and have their being:’ abstracted from which, through every successive moment, their nature, their existence, their powers, and their operations, are as NOTHING.

After viewing this truth, equally awful and indubitable, in relation to every individual creature, and to the whole created universe, through the medium of revealed principles; and after dwelling upon it habitually as a point closely connected with personal religion; the author could not resist, had he been desirous of resisting, the evidence which presented itself, as clearly implied in the preceding considerations, respecting the true source of the futuration of moral evil. Were the event of human transgression to originate in the

nature of God, or in his will, ever conformable to his nature, it could not be evil ; he could not abhor and condemn it ; and were it to originate exclusively in man's active powers, it must ultimately proceed from God, involving the same consequences as though directly willed by him. It must, therefore, originate, not in God, not in chance, not in a self-determining power of the will, (which is clearly reducible to a contradiction ;) but in a principle of defectibility in a free agent, the operation of which, nevertheless, the all-sufficient source of good is always able to prevent. And there is no scheme but must come to this conclusion at last,—that it is within the province of the divine prerogative to prevent countless millions of moral evils, which in fact he permits, and which, were it inconsistent with his infinite wisdom, or with the exercise of any divine perfection, he would not permit.

The PRINCIPLE from which this conclu-

sion is deduced, the author cannot consent to regard as a mere *hypothesis* concerning the origin of moral evil. So far from this, he is convinced it is a truth necessarily implied in a demonstration of the first cause, with which it must stand or fall. Hypothesis implies an unproved supposition as the basis of a theory; or a system formed on a principle gratuitously assumed; but here no data are assumed, which are not either granted by all as first principles, or the negation of which does not involve a direct contradiction. In moral science, indeed, there is no axiom so perfectly self-evident, as to be exempt from cavils. By some unhallowed lips, even the existence of Deity has been called into doubt: but mere denial can never be thought sufficient to discredit the pretensions of demonstration, provided that denial be reducible to an evident absurdity.

There is one consideration of great importance on this head, which has been very



generally disregarded, viz.—that to ascertain the true *origin* of moral evil is very different from ascertaining the precise *mode* of its origination.\* When this distinction is not considered, it ceases to be a matter of surprise, that prejudice and dislike should fortify the mind against every effort of enquiry. Conceding the identity of these propositions, the writer could not hesitate for a moment to conclude that, on this subject, a demonstration would be impossible; inasmuch as there would be no conceivable data for demonstrative evidence.

\* To the general philosopher, and particularly to the physiologist and chemist, it will easily occur, that the *modus* of a process in producing an effect may remain a profound mystery, while the remoter *cause* of such an effect may be satisfactorily demonstrated. And the same observation is applicable to works of art; but more especially to the process and origin of moral good and evil. In reference to these, the precise point of enquiry is, not *how* the mind acquires ideas, becomes the subject of associations, passions, or pursuits, which at best amounts only to probable conjecture, but what is the *ULTIMATE SOURCE* of the one and the other? The true answer to this enquiry leads, in the most direct manner, to piety, because it leads us to the knowledge of *God* and of *ourselves*.

God, indeed, might condescend to reveal the mode in which the first sin of an angelic being, for instance, originated, as a matter of testimony to be believed; but in that case it would be an object of faith, on the evidence of divine veracity—not an object of science, on the evidence of first principles. And since the Almighty has not been pleased to make any such communication, we may infer that the knowledge of it is neither necessary nor important. Whatever God has testified, it is our duty to credit firmly, to receive thankfully, and to improve diligently. If in the scriptures he has afforded some account of the mode of creation, it was not to gratify vain curiosity, but more strongly to impress on our minds that he is the adorable source of life and beauty, of power and excellence, of wisdom and goodness. In like manner, if he has given us a revelation of the mode of the entrance of sin into our world, it was not with a design to excite the imagination of the vain and curious speculatist,

but to fix more deeply and powerfully the conviction in our hearts,—that while he is the source of our happiness, we in our best estate are vanity, having no security for our well-being, but in submission to his will; that we are in constant danger of being tempted to sin by subtle adversaries, and even by the bounties of providence, by our senses, by our imaginations, and by a thirst after unprofitable knowledge; and that the source of our sin and misery is in ourselves. He, assuredly, who best knows his own weakness, is ever the most ready to quit his grasp of a created arm, that he may rely on God, in whom there is ‘fulness of joy,’ and ‘safety from fear of evil.’ And such, the writer conceives, is the direct tendency of a real knowledge of sin’s ultimate source; under the influence of which the soul stands in awe of God’s infinite majesty, views his unapproachable excellence with love and admiration, abides with him as the fountain of life and joy, fears to place its confidence in creatures,

the best of whom are but as the fleeting shadow, and rejoices in hope of ‘ the glory ‘ that shall be revealed,’—when intercourse with the Creator will be more intimate and delightful, though not less dependant upon his favour, than in the present state.

Inseparably connected with the preceding steps of enquiry, were those views of the divine character which correspond to the two-fold relation of man, who is at once necessitated and free. The questions principally to be ascertained were, what is the true cause of necessitation to good? and, what is the true cause of freedom, or exemption from a decreitive necessitation to moral evil? And by observing the same process of investigation ; by first examining into scriptural positive evidence, and then, comparing that evidence with true principles of reason ; it was found, that no other adequate cause could be assigned of necessitation to good, but SOVEREIGN BENEVOLENCE ; nor any other adequate

cause of exemption from decretive necessity, but **DIVINE EQUITY**.

The more strictly and impartially this enquiry was made, the more forcible was the evidence, that to these two causes were all the parts of Ethics and Theology ultimately to be referred. Hence arose the author's determination to attempt a scriptural and rational display of the Equity of Divine Government and the Sovereignty of Divine Grace, and an examination of different systems by the light of these first principles. At first, indeed, the design was to publish a small essay, containing merely the writer's leading ideas; but as he proceeded in arranging his thoughts, the subject seemed to acquire accumulated interest and importance. Accordingly, he formed his plan, and announced his intention of publishing an octavo volume: and, amidst many interruptions from personal and domestic illness, change of situation, and multiplied engage-



ments, he wrote the greatest part of the work at distant intervals. From the commencement of his researches, the author entertained a strong and habitual conviction, that the primary and essential parts of his projected undertaking were not only deduced from, and in harmony with scripture, but also that they were of the utmost importance towards a satisfactory view of religion in all its bearings: and he was therefore not a little anxious to ascertain, whether they would sustain with equal satisfaction to his own mind, the test of continued experience, in their personal and practical influence; of argument, by means of reflection, conversation, reading, and correspondence; and of prejudice, ever watchful and alert against even the semblance of deviation from long-established modes of thinking. On trial, he found—at least he thought—this last to be the only formidable enemy; while the experiment has afforded him the most satisfactory proof of a warm approbation from persons

whose judgment, piety, and usefulness, are highly respected in the religious world. Taking all things, therefore, into account, the delay which occurred in publishing the first edition of this work, is far from being a subject of regret; for though efforts have been made, with more zeal than generosity, to represent his views of Equity and Sovereignty, and some important truths inseparably connected therewith, as an unprofitable speculation (than which nothing assuredly could be more unfounded;) yet it has at least been the means of preparing the public mind to view the subject with deeper attention,—an attention which, he sincerely hopes, will prove growingly advantageous to the principles he has here undertaken to explain and defend.

After a vigilant regard to the interests of consistent theology for more than thirty years; after constant prayers to God, ‘the only wise,’ for direction; after trying the effect of these principles (by a virtual and

habitual implication) on the congregations where providence has called him to officiate in the gospel ministry ; after feeling, when apparently on the very borders of an eternal world, that constant and devout meditation on the equity of divine government and the sovereignty of divine grace, was fraught with unspeakable comfort;—the author resolved to venture his book abroad under the form in which it was first written (for which he had important reasons, both of a private and public nature, forming more than a counterbalance to any deficiency of verbal ornaments,) with fervent supplications for a blessing to rest on every reader, and with firm and unshaken confidence, that the sentiments contained in it are *truths* highly important to be well understood by professing Christians, and especially by theological students and ministers.

It was before intimated that, at various times, some of the leading thoughts dis-

cussed in this publication have been submitted to the public. These have called forth the opposition of different writers, for whose extraordinary opinions, and still more extraordinary misrepresentations, it is difficult to account. How could it be reconciled with common candour, to assume a sense of terms which the author had previously disavowed by various and repeated explanations? To triumph in supposed consequences so deduced, argued a disingenuous, not to say unmanly, mode of attack, and a disposition not very friendly to the attainment of sacred truth. Had any persons professing themselves the followers of PELAGIUS produced such publications and criticisms as have recently appeared, in order to counteract the doctrines of sovereign grace, and to exalt the creature's self-sufficiency to secure his own goodness, their denomination would have served as an antidote to those whose sentiments are avowedly opposite. But controversial publications which have no settled explanation

of terms,—which do not even pretend to any fixed opinions on the subject they discuss,—seem but little calculated to cope with the subtle adversaries of evangelical religion. Such works may obtain approbation for a time, from unwary readers ;—but truth is no temporizer. The author, then, would indulge the hope, that the reader of the following pages will not come to the perusal of them prejudiced by uncandid insinuations. Instead of thinking the work sufficiently discredited by the appellation of “ a new theological scheme,” let him calmly examine whether it be not more properly denominated “ a new argument against error,” or, “ additional evidence for the truth ;” for the good old way so frequently and fiercely spoken against, for the tenets of the reformation unadulterated by false philosophy, in a word, for the doctrine which is according to godliness, opposed alike by the profane profligate, the haughty pharisee, and the conceited sceptic.



The views and resolutions detailed in the preceding paragraphs, it is presumed, might be sufficient to preclude the inference, that a predilection for novelty prompted the publication of this work; the nature of its principles being such, that, in proportion as they are substantiated, they must appear to every reflecting mind, of fundamental importance in religion and moral science. A statement, however, of some *specific ends* proposed to be answered by it, may be naturally expected, as the value of principles must be estimated from their capability of application to useful purposes. The author, therefore, frankly states that he has in view—to counteract the spreading and growing influence of what he considers a false and pernicious moral philosophy;—to exhibit the divine character in an honourable, amiable, and attractive light;—to reconcile seeming inconsistencies respecting the divine conduct;—to confirm serious Christians in the radical principles of revealed truth,

against the subtleties of scepticism ;— and to vindicate the rationality of experimental religion, against the too prevalent charge of enthusiasm.

In the first place, he wishes to counteract the spreading influence of that spurious moral philosophy, which ascribes to the active powers of man a strange kind of self-sufficiency, in opposition to the gracious influence of God ; and of another, which imputes to the Supreme Being effects which he expressly hates and condemns. The one, in effect, idolizes the creature, by assigning to it that which is the sole prerogative of Deity ; the other irreverently imposes upon God what belongs exclusively to man. The former, which, sanctioned as it is by the respectable names of REID and BEATTIE, has insinuated itself so widely into religious opinions, is, in the author's view, neither more nor less than the old Pelagian doctrine under a new-fashioned philosophical appearance.

The latter, under the name of “philosophical necessity,” countenanced by HARTLEY, PRIESTLEY, and several others, and rendered plausible by the acuteness of its defenders, will be found, on careful examination, to be utterly incompatible with the existence of a moral system of accountability. What the Heathens ascribed to Fate, *they* ascribe to the designing First Cause, without any discrimination between moral good and evil. Each of these systems maintains, indeed, a part of the truth; but maintaining a part only, each is calculated to promote scepticism and irreligion. That which exalts man above his true standard is the philosophy of conjecture, beyond which it makes no pretensions. The other indeed professes to assign *proofs* in every step of the process,—but on principles equally assumed and unfounded. Its *πρωτον ψευδος*, its radical fallacy, consists in asserting that there is no ground of certainty in the nature of things, but the decretive will of the First Cause—a doc-

trine which dishonours the divine character, subverts a moral system, and stands opposed to demonstrable truth ;—for that there exists, in the nature of things, a negative principle of certainty respecting evil, is a truth which, though entirely overlooked by these philosophers, is no less capable of demonstrative evidence, than its counterpart—that there exists in the nature of things, a positive principle of certainty respecting good. Whichever therefore of the schemes in question be adopted ; whether the self-sufficiency of Pelagius, or the necessity of Priestley, its advocate will have to contend, in a greater or less degree, with the unforced language and uniform tenor of divine revelation, the consciousness of the humble and benevolent Christian in his most refined and heavenly tempers, the ultimate dictates of common sense, and the legitimate use of right reason. These, however, are adversaries of no feeble prowess ; and the man who has them for his associates, has little cause to be apprehensive for the result.

Numbers there are, who defend the doctrines of grace by a constant appeal to ‘chapter and verse;’ and they do well. At the same time it will not be pretended, that this is the only mode by which truth may be stated and enforced. From the press at least, (though seldom perhaps, from the pulpit, in a professed manner, before a mixed audience) it is right to meet the enemies of divine truth, by shewing that their tenets are irrational as well as unscriptural; that when they argue correctly, their principles are false, or that when their principles are admissible, their reasoning is inconclusive. To make use of the term ‘metaphysics,’ as a watch-word, in order to avoid every thing defended by the science, as if faith in the pure gospel were in danger, is a weakness,\*

\* “ I confess the old Popish schoolmen have mingled a number of useless subtleties with this science ; they have exhausted their own spirits, and the spirits of their readers, in many laborious and intricate trifles ; and some of their writings have been fruitful of names without ideas, which have done much injury to the sacred study of divinity. Upon this



to which a reflecting mind might be expected to rise superior. If reputed metaphysical writers reproach evangelical religion as an irrational system, it is clearly the more incumbent on its friends,—who exult in its unrivalled excellency, though clothed in the simplest dress,—to evince, that it is perfectly consistent with the first principles of reason, and that the various hypotheses of its opposers cannot stand the test of close investigation. To shrink from enquiry, under such a charge, would be virtually to confess the weakness of our cause,—to confess that faith and sound philosophy, religion and right reason, are

account many of the moderns have most unjustly abandoned the whole science at once, and thrown abundance of contempt and raillery upon the very name of *metaphysics*; but this contempt and censure is very unreasonable, for this science, separated from some Aristotelian fooleries, and scholastic subtleties, is so necessary to a just conception, solid judgment, and just reasoning on many subjects, that sometimes it is introduced as a part of Logic, and not without reason. And those who utterly despise and ridicule it, either betray their own ignorance, or will be supposed to make their wit and banter a refuge and excuse for their own laziness.”

WATTS's *Logic*. Part I. ch. vi. sect. 9.

incompatible,—to confess, either that we are believers of an irrational creed, or ignorant of its true import. That ‘science,’ ‘falsely so called,’ has been the means of perverting the simple truths of the gospel, is but too evident in every page of ecclesiastical history ; but it is also an undeniable fact, that false interpretations of scripture have corrupted the schools of moral philosophy. The influence, indeed, is reciprocal ; defection in the one, producing deterioration in the other.

It is unreservedly admitted, that after we have obtained appropriate and adequate evidence of a revelation from God, we ought not first to reason, and then to believe. No ; let us first believe what God asserts, and *because* he asserts it : after which we may endeavour to convince those who question our *interpretation* of scripture, that we are not deceived in our conclusions. But with the philosophic infidel we have to contend on a different ground. He

maintains that what we pronounce to be the genuine sense of revealed declarations is a mistake, *because* it does not comport with rational principles. Let us then meet him fairly and manfully; and prove, even on his own shewing, that his objections are futile.

The fashion of decrying metaphysics as useless and dangerous, seems to have arisen much about the time that Dr. BEATTIE attacked Mr. HUME and other sceptical writers, in his “Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth;” a work in which we are taught to consider common sense (assuming it to be at war with the obnoxious science), as the final test of evidence. The method he adopted was followed by two effects: one was to bring into discredit the writings he opposed; and a very happy effect it was;—while the other unfortunately was of a very different complexion. By calling HUME a metaphysician, he contributed towards forming

an association, in the minds of those to whom it is irksome to think closely, between sceptical philosophy and metaphysics; and thus to bring into disrepute a sublime and most useful science. Dr. BEATTIE would have done much greater service to the cause of truth, had he represented Mr. HUME as an acute wrangler. To reason with subtlety on principles fundamentally false, is the province of the sophist, not of the true philosopher. Perhaps, indeed, there never was a man, of equal parts, less entitled to the honourable appellation of a metaphysician than Mr. HUME; and certainly it would be difficult to point out a term in the whole nomenclature of science, in its hackneyed acceptation, so little connected with a clear and distinct idea, and consequently so much abused. If it be what BACON represents it, *philosophia prima*, the *first philosophy*, in point of eminence—the science of compatibles and incompatibles, of possibles and impossibles, and therefore

at the root of all knowledge, insomuch that mathematical science itself is but a branch of it; who that is wise would think of treating it with scorn? But if, as Dr. BEATTIE insinuates, the science consists in ‘verbal disputation without precise ideas;’ if its aim be ‘to divest the mind of every principle, and of all conviction; and, consequently, to disqualify man for action, and to render him as useless and wretched as possible;’ if it intend ‘that mode of abstract investigation which is supported by ambiguous and indefinite phraseology, and partial experience; and which seldom fails to lead to such conclusions as contradict matter of fact, or truths of indubitable authority;’ let it be for ever banished into those regions of darkness whose prince is the father of falsehood: or if it be permitted to occupy any spot of this earth, let it be some SOLITARY CRETE, whose inhabitants are ‘always liars.’

Epithets of eulogy or reproach, though



easily invented, do not alter the nature of ideas. If then, while contemplating the Temple of Truth, we are assisted by *any* science, (the denomination is of little importance,) to perceive the grandeur of its design, its majestic simplicity, its admirable proportions, and its exquisite ornaments; if, too, while viewing the Temple of Error, we are enabled, by the same assistance, to detect the insecurity of its foundation, the weakness of its pillars, and its disgusting want of symmetry, ill atoned for by gaudy and capricious embellishments;—to speak contemptuously of such aid, would be a mark of ignorance and folly, and to cultivate acquaintance with it, worthy of the purest wisdom.

A second design of this work is, to exhibit the glory of the DIVINE CHARACTER, particularly in the condemnation of the finally impenitent and the salvation of the faithful. These effects, though they have a distinguished prominence in the inspired

pages, are too often regarded as proceeding from arbitrary will, without distinction. It is intended to shew that, while salvation from sin, and happiness in heaven, flow from sovereign pleasure, the condemnation of the disobedient proceeds from the divine *nature*. The cause of condemnation is in and from the sinner himself. To every wicked character God's holy nature in exercise, is of *necessity* opposed. For the Deity not to condemn such a character, would be to renounce the glory of his own holy nature. Sooner might the moth rush unharmed into the dazzling flame, than an impenitent transgressor not be consumed, as to his well-being, by the divine holiness and justice. God will by no means clear the guilty. A reverse of sentence must be founded in a change of character.

A third design is, to reconcile seeming inconsistencies respecting the divine conduct. It is an evident fact that God per-

mits (or does not hinder) the event of sin; and it is equally evident that he hates and condemns it. Since the prevention of sin implies no contradiction, it is indubitable that God *could* prevent its occurrence when he *does not*. The more depraved any rational being is, the more impotent and helpless is he, in a moral sense, and therefore the less qualified to render obedience; while, at the same time, there is no exemption from required obedience, nor is there, in the divine conduct, any diminution of claim on account of such imbecility. Again, the scriptures declare that God “wills all to be saved;” and yet, in fact, all are not saved; while at the same time he could save those who are lost. Moreover, whatever God effects in time, he must always have purposed to effect, even from eternity: this implies an unalterable decree of the event; and yet man is free in his agency; neither constrained to evil, nor restrained from good in his accountable actions; so that the latter idea

seems to admit a sort of contingency; while the former evidently involves a fixed certainty. These are some of the difficulties proposed to be solved by the view of Divine Equity and Sovereignty hereafter exhibited.

Another intention of this work is, to establish believing Christians in the leading principles of revealed truth, by exposing those which are false, and bringing them to a legitimate test. The method often adopted of shewing that equal difficulties recoil on an objector, appears by no means convincing and satisfactory. From the mere circumstance that another is wrong, no one can fairly conclude that he himself is right; since without positive proof to the contrary, both may be wrong—

unus utrique

Error sed variis illudit partibus.

Doubtless, for an objector to urge a difficulty which equally presses upon himself,

is impertinent; but to expose his impertinence is not to solve his difficulties. By proving, for instance, in the most satisfactory manner, that a self-determining power in the will is an absurdity, without shewing the ground of the fallacy, and where the truth lies, you only erect a mound to stop the progress of error, which, unless diverted into the channel of truth, will continue to accumulate until it rush forth with greater violence. To substantiate the charge of error, therefore, is not enough. We should further shew its radical principle, and how it may be rectified, or the enquirer is either left exposed to the snares of scepticism, or is strengthened in the fortress of his prejudices.

Most mistakes in religion may be traced to wrong apprehensions of God's moral government and sovereign prerogative. An erroneous theological system may be compared to a diseased human body. One distemper may emaciate and consume it,



another swell it to a disproportioned size; by one it may be enervated, by another enflamed; but all disorders, however opposite in their immediate causes, or diversified in their symptoms, tend to the same point, the destruction of the frame. So it is in matters of religion. Perhaps there never was a heresy that did not rise from an apprehension of some truth, which by degrees was exalted to a fantastic importance, at the expense of other truths that were overlooked. And the most dangerous errors have been those which magnified the *circumstantials* at the cost of the *essentials* of religion; that aggravated enormously points of small moment, while others of the greatest were disregarded; until at length the symmetry of the whole was entirely destroyed. Hence, for instance, the gratuitous assumption and dreadful extension of tyrannical power, and the almost fiendish energies of persecution, under a pretence of defending and preserving *uniformity in religion*. But, not

to dwell on these odious excesses, how deeply is it to be lamented, that some whose principles were incomparably more important, have on the one hand, maintained the honours of divine grace by casting into the shade the glories of divine government; while others, on the contrary, have contended for the honours of divine legislation and government in such a manner as to draw a dark veil over the glories of sovereign grace. In this Essay, it is attempted to guard against these extremes, and to display each of these grand truths according to the beautiful proportion maintained in the sacred oracles; and in the degree this is accomplished, the believing Christian will have additional grounds of attachment to the holy scriptures, and to the fundamental principles they contain.

In the last place, it is one specific design of this Essay, to vindicate what is very properly called EXPERIMENTAL CHRISTIANITY from unmerited slander and

reproach. In every age of the Christian church its best members have been objects of scorn and slander to the sons of folly: and in the present day there are not a few who exert their utmost efforts to render their obloquies *fashionable*. Provided they can accomplish their end, they are not very scrupulous about the means: ridicule or intolerance, it amounts to the same thing, so that the enthusiasts can be “caught and crushed.” The man who presumes to talk about an ‘experience’ of the scriptural effects of divine truth on the heart and life, on the conscience and affections, must in the nature of things be either a bad subject or a raving maniac; and ought, accordingly, to be consigned to a prison or an asylum. Now though to reason *with* such characters is next to hopeless, yet to reason *against* them, and to expose their absurdity, may be of advantage to the cause of truth and virtue.

‘Wisdom is justified of her children.’ In

proportion as the Christian who "is clothed with humility," with whom "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding," examines the fundamental principles of the religion he professes, the greater will be his inducement to admire it, and to cultivate an experience of its efficacy. It is hoped that the leading views developed in this publication will contribute to endear to him a humble and resigned temper of mind, a habit of devotion and "fellowship with the Father and the Son," a life of faith and love, zeal and exertion in every good cause; that he will find the ways of wisdom more pleasant, and her paths more peaceful; that his attachment to redeeming grace will be stronger, and his obedience more uniform and circumspect. He may perceive that Christian experience is the most reasonable thing in the world, and that it cannot be rejected as the unmeaning cant of a party, without abandoning religion itself, and the eternal difference between the

adorable Creator and his dependant creatures. He will see the truest wisdom exemplified in one "who trembles at the word of the Lord," and who is prostrate in spirit at his throne, adoring his infinite majesty, adhering to and delighting in his matchless excellency, confiding in his veracity and faithfulness, and rejoicing in hope of the heavenly inheritance. And so far will this experience be from rendering him an unprofitable recluse, that it will better qualify him for useful, active service, in the situation allotted him by providence, and render him more promptly "ready to every good work."



# EQUITY AND SOVEREIGNTY.

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## CHAP. I.

SOME PREPARATORY OBSERVATIONS, ON DIFFICULTIES  
TO BE SURMOUNTED, AND ON THE NATURE AND  
USE OF SCRIPTURE AUTHORITY AND EVIDENCE.

### SECT. I.

#### *On Difficulties to be Surmounted.*

THERE have existed but a small number of human characters who denied that they were the subjects of *moral obligation*; and, indeed, how can any person reflect seriously without admitting the solemn fact? If *man* be not such a subject—an accountable creature, originally and constantly designed to render voluntary homage to the will of God—we have no evidence that any being in the universe *can* be morally obliged. But to maintain such a consequence is to move, with unhallowed steps, to the gloomy regions of atheism. For it seems impossible that any one should either prove, or believe on just grounds, the existence of a First Cause, without admitting, on the same grounds, his own obligations to obey him. His possessing powers to produce this evidence, in

connexion with his conscious freedom, would be unimpeachable witnesses against his denial. The separate and united verdict of conscience, of reason, and of revelation, in evidence of this point, being so universally acknowledged as decisive, renders a particular discussion of it, in this place, unnecessary. What is its proper nature, and the foundation on which it rests, will be explained in a subsequent part of the work.

But if man be a subject of moral obligation, it is requisite he should be *free* in his moral actions. We cannot say that any being is morally obliged, but on condition that he is formed to act freely according to his pleasure, without being constrained in his wrong, and restrained in his right choice; the limits of his freedom, to act as he pleases, being the limits of his obligations. Again, to say that man has not a *physical power* to act according to his volitions, is the same in effect as to say, he is not obliged so to act. Thus it is clear, if man have not liberty, or is destitute of physical power, to love and serve God according to his conviction, he is not to be blamed for not performing those actions. We should remark, however, that when any choice is contrary to *rectitude*, or inconsistent with it, whether the object be attainable or unattainable, freedom is

abused. For though we are not obliged to perform what is physically impossible, any more than what is morally improper, yet any *volition* of a moral agent which is not according to rectitude, is morally *evil*.

Of the existence of this freedom, or liberty of choice, every thinking person has the evidence of consciousness and reiterated experience. From these sources, notwithstanding the efforts of scepticism to prove that his liberty is an illusion, he is assured that he is free, in all his moral actions. He finds, as the result of his maturest reflection, that his *accountableness* to the supreme Governor is not only the inseparable adjunct, but also the necessary *effect*, of liberty properly so called. I said, liberty *properly* so called; for it should not be confounded with mere spontaneity, as observed in brutes. The character of *will*, indeed, is somewhat similar in all beings; but human liberty and brutal spontaneity are not only essentially different, but directly opposite. The latter is a physical impulse, according to established laws; but the former is *exemption* from physical impulse. Hence the one class of beings is capable of morality and accountableness, while the other is incapable.

Nevertheless, however absolute the character

of human liberty, as before admitted, by ascribing to God the attribute of perfect *wisdom*, we exclude *chance* out of the universe. The one is light, the other is darkness; and where pure and perfect light pervades all, in the same proportion darkness is excluded. Seeing, therefore, the Almighty Sovereign of the universe is infinitely wise, every created entity, whether being or action, which could not exist but by his will, must be the effect of unfrustrable design. Besides, not only whatever takes place in time must be foreseen by omniscience, but also whatever has an efficient cause must be the effect of omnipotence. Hence the pre-determination of all entity in human actions.

We observe in the world around us, independently of the evidence formed by testimony, numerous instances of *evil*; and many signal displays are made of wisdom and beneficence, power and grace, which could not be exhibited without the prior occurrence of moral failure. This is abundantly evident from the plan of redeeming mercy, and that illustrious effect of divine benevolence, the gospel dispensation. But is evil a *necessary* instrument in order to produce good? What, then, becomes of the divine holiness, that should employ such means; of the divine wisdom and power, that should require them; and of the divine goodness and equity, that

should leave accountable creatures to their influence? These considerations imply no small difficulties to be surmounted.

Hence, to reconcile the occurrence of moral evil with the acknowledged perfections of Deity; the irreversible divine decrees with human liberty; or, which involves the same result, to determine (ποθεν το κακον) *whence comes evil*, has been in every age, more or less, the ‘great cross of theologues,’ and the *desideratum* of moral philosophers. ORIGEN properly observes, that ‘if there be any thing in human affairs, ‘proposed to examination, which our nature ‘finds difficult to investigate and comprehend, ‘it is the *origin of evil*.’\* And this, in effect, has been the language of most persons who have closely thought upon the subject. Yet, it must be acknowledged, that few have considered the *importance* of ascertaining this point, in order to subserve the cause of moral science, of true virtue, and of religion. They seem to have regarded it as a question of mere speculation, which, if satisfactorily answered, would be applicable to no useful purpose either in religion or morals: and assuming this opinion, it must have appeared a part of Christian wisdom to protest against the attempt. But if the opinion

\* ORIG. *Contra Celsum*. Lib. iv.



be founded in error, if so far from involving a criminal waste of time, the investigation itself, on right principles, lead directly to pious exercises of mind, to a sublimer knowledge of God, and a more intimate acquaintance with ourselves; and if the very mode of enquiry stand nearly connected with the fundamental principles of revealed religion, and with the very temper which Christianity inspires, the question assumes another aspect, and is indeed essentially different.

As forming a suitable part of my design, I shall present the reader with a few extracts, which exhibit in a striking manner the difficulties of this part of our subject, and with what disposition it should be studied. Of all the passages I have met with in human writings—calculated at once to check presumption, and to direct the mind to the most profitable improvement of the humbling difficulty—a Lecture addressed by Archbishop LEIGHTON to the students in divinity, in the public hall of the University of Edinburgh, has made the deepest impression on my mind. After some remarks on the divine prescience, intention, counsels, fixed determination, and wisdom; and on the presumption of endeavouring to break into the sacred repositories of heaven; he observes: ‘They always seemed to me to act a very

‘ ridiculous part, who contend, that the effect  
‘ of the divine decree is *absolutely irreconcilable*  
‘ with human liberty.—But, in a word, the GREAT  
‘ DIFFICULTY in all this dispute is, that with  
‘ regard to the *origin of evil*. Some distinguish,  
‘ and justly, the substance of the action, as you  
‘ call it, or that which is physical in the action,  
‘ from the morality of it. This is of some  
‘ weight; but whether it takes away the *whole*  
‘ difficulty, I will not pretend to say. Believe me,  
‘ young gentlemen, it is an abyss, it is an abyss  
‘ *never to be perfectly fathomed* by any plummet of  
‘ human understanding.—Wherefore, if you will  
‘ take my advice, withdraw your minds from a  
‘ *curious search* into this mystery, and turn them  
‘ *directly* to the *study of piety*, and a due rever-  
‘ ence to the awful majesty of God. Think  
‘ and speak of God and his *secrets* with fear and  
‘ trembling, but *dispute very little* about them;  
‘ and, if you would not undo yourselves, *beware*  
‘ *of disputing with him*; if you *transgress* in any  
‘ thing, *blame YOURSELVES*; if you do *any good*,  
‘ *offer thanksgiving to God*. This is what I  
‘ earnestly recommend to you; in this I acquiesce  
‘ myself; and to this, when much tossed and  
‘ distressed with doubt and difficulties, I had  
‘ recourse as to a safe harbour.’\*

After attentive perusals, and a repeated con-

\* LEIGHTON’S Theological Lectures. Lect. x.

sideration of this address, I was at a loss, for a while, whether I should advance in my enquiries concerning Divine Equity and Sovereignty and the subjects which they involve. Proceeding from a mind so enlarged by reading and reflection, and so remarkably devout, the Lecturer's advice to his pupils 'to dispute very 'little' about these mysteries, and to 'turn their 'minds directly to the study of piety,' amounted with me to almost a prohibition from making any further efforts. By degrees, however, I perceived that the author, in common with his predecessors, had assumed some hasty notions respecting the subject itself and the mode of its investigation. He seems to take for granted in the outset, that a close attention to this mystery, is inseparable from a 'curious 'search:' whereas this can only be affirmed, when the investigation is made on wrong principles, or with improper views. A bold and presumptuous curiosity is dangerous at all times, whatever divine theme be the object of enquiry. He seems to think, again, that to turn the mind 'directly to the study of piety, and a due 'reverence to the awful majesty of God,' is to turn it away from the point in question. Now, in reality, the more direct our attention is to piety and holy reverence, the greater is the probability of success in discovering the true source of any subject that relates immediately to

God and ourselves: and we might as well pretend that a scriptural knowledge of these objects is incompatible with practical religion, as that a legitimate investigation of the origin of evil is inconsistent with a direct study of piety and reverence towards God. We may remark further, that this amiable man had made near approaches towards the solution of those difficulties which he states, by the very method he recommends; and by which, as he declares, he found ‘a safe ‘harbour,’ after being ‘much tossed and distressed ‘with doubt and difficulties.’ ‘If you transgress ‘in any thing, blame YOURSELVES; if you do ‘any good, offer thanksgiving to God.’ Every one must perceive that this is to turn the mind ‘directly’ to the study of piety; but then it is no less the direct road to a discovery of the origin of evil. Viewing the subject, therefore, in this light, my former hesitation was converted into a stronger hope of success; and instead of abandoning the original design, I only determined to be doubly cautious in the prosecution of it; to avoid all rash curiosity in my researches into subjects confessedly awful; and, above all, to ‘beware of disputing against God.’

But the most formidable difficulty, as it presented itself to the view of Archbishop LEIGHTON, still remains to be noticed: ‘Believe ‘me, young gentlemen, it is an abyss, *it is an*

'*abyss never to be perfectly fathomed* by any plummet of human understanding.' The sentiment of this proposition is rather ambiguous. If by 'perfectly fathomed' be meant, that some things *relating* to the origin of evil, some *ends* to be answered by its *permission*, some instances of its being over-ruled for good, &c. are not to be fully comprehended by a human mind; it may well be admitted: the same declaration may be predicated of our own minds and faculties, of our bodies, of every animal that moves, of every plant that vegetates, and of every particle of matter that exists. But because we do not know every thing, does it follow that we know nothing? There are some things, relative to these objects, of which, unquestionably, we have a clear idea; and the proposition asserting that clear idea may be pronounced 'perfectly fathomed,'—as in mathematical and demonstrative conclusions. Moreover, as many things in natural philosophy are ascertained to the utmost certainty, which appeared to the ancients perfectly 'unfathomable,' what good reason can be assigned that *moral* science has reached its highest elevation? Or why should we conclude, that no additional evidence is attainable, respecting the contents of scripture, the divine dispensations, government, or grace? Though a blade of grass, or a grain of sand, may have *some* inscrutable properties, that



is no evidence why *all* properties of matter, or *all* the laws of motion, should be so. How common has been the persuasion that the origin of water, the cause of lightning, &c. were inexplicable; and how many, after their most laborious investigations, have concluded that the true motion and uniform laws of the solar system were not to be ascertained by mortals!

Highly as I venerate the character, and esteem the writings of Archbishop LEIGHTON, I cannot approve the spirit of his assertion, as it evidently tends to check the progress of moral science; and affords a plausible occasion to scepticism, though nothing doubtless was more distant from his intention. In the view of a sceptic, the assertion implies that sin *has no* discoverable origin; and consequently, that probably there is no ultimate cause of moral evil in the universe! Nor is it any part of humility to make our attainments the standard beyond which another must not hope to succeed. He who would *consistently* advance the sentiment, that a clear knowledge of a given subject is not attainable, ought to have it in his power to shew, that such an attainment implies contradictory ideas. But who ever attempted to shew, that the supposition of a right and clear knowledge of the origin of evil is of that character? The proposition which asserts

the discovery of a perpetual motion deserves no credit, and it may be fairly pronounced unattainable. But why? Not because many ingenious persons have failed in the attempt, but because it is utterly at variance with the existing laws of nature.

All will admit that self-knowledge is attainable in *some* degree, and that it is a part of true wisdom to improve it. Now what part of this knowledge is more important, than that of our *good* and *evil*? And what kind of knowledge is more excellent, than that which implies an acquaintance with effects in their true causes? What indeed is philosophy without this? A thousand phenomena are observed by the young child and the hoary philosopher with an equal perfection of sense; but the former merely observes, while the latter is acquainted with the causes and the uses of these effects. To know the source of our good, it is plain, is essential to true religion; and can it then be uninteresting or useless to know whether our *evil* be from ourselves or from some other origin? Is it a question of unprofitable tendency, a mere speculation inapplicable to moral and religious uses, whether moral evil be from our Maker; or from ourselves without his causation? If, however, it originate in ourselves, there seems to be no reason for pretending that a clear, a satisfactory, a demonstrative idea of this part of self-

knowledge is unattainable: and if the knowledge of an interesting object be attainable, by what authority are we forbidden to enquire after it? ‘Let the hope of new discoveries,’ says Dr. WATTS, ‘as well as the satisfaction and pleasure of known truths, animate your daily industry. Do not think that learning in general is arrived at its perfection, or that the knowledge of any particular subject in any science cannot be improved, merely because it has lain five hundred or a thousand years without improvement.—Nor should a student in divinity imagine that our age is arrived at a full understanding of every thing which can be known by the scriptures.—Since there are at present many difficulties and darkneses hanging about certain truths of the Christian religion, and since several of these relate to important doctrines—such as the *origin of sin*, the fall of Adam, the person of Christ, the blessed Trinity, and the *decrees of God*, &c.—which do still embarrass the minds of honest and enquiring readers, and which make work for noisy controversy; it is certain, there are several things in the Bible yet unknown, and not sufficiently explained: and *it is certain, that there is some way to solve these difficulties, and to reconcile these seeming contradictions*. And why may not a sincere searcher of truth in the present age, by labour, diligence, study and prayer, with

‘ the best use of his reasoning powers, find out  
 ‘ the *proper solution* of those knots and per-  
 ‘ plexities which hitherto have been unsolved,  
 ‘ and which have afforded matter of angry  
 ‘ quarrelling?—Happy is every man who shall  
 ‘ be favoured of Heaven to give a helping hand  
 ‘ towards that introduction of the blessed age  
 ‘ of light and love.’\*

Among many other passages expressive of the difficulties to be surmounted, which have occurred in the course of my reading, there is one more, which I beg leave to present to the reader, extracted from a very celebrated author—the learned, the penetrating, the sublime

\* WATTS’S Improvement of the Mind, chap. i. § 7.

Nearly to the same effect are these remarks of Bishop BUTLER: ‘ One might go on to add, that there is a great  
 ‘ resemblance between the light of nature and of revelation,  
 ‘ in several other respects. Practical Christianity, or that faith  
 ‘ and behaviour which render a man a Christian, is a plain and  
 ‘ obvious thing; like the common rules of conduct, with  
 ‘ respect to our ordinary temporal affairs. The more distinct  
 ‘ and particular knowledge of those things, the study of which  
 ‘ the apostle calls ‘going on unto perfection,’—like many parts  
 ‘ of natural and even civil knowledge,—may require very  
 ‘ exact thought, and careful consideration. The hindrances,  
 ‘ too, of natural and of supernatural light and knowledge,  
 ‘ have been of the same kind. And as, it is owned, the whole  
 ‘ scheme of scripture is not yet understood; so, if it ever  
 ‘ comes to be understood, before the ‘restitution of all things,’  
 ‘ and without miraculous interpositions, it must be in the same

SAURIN. ‘The questions, concerning the *decrees of God*, says he, ‘are so abstruse, that in ‘all ages of the Church, and particularly since ‘the schism of PELAGIUS, divines orthodox and ‘heterodox have employed all their efforts to ‘give us a system free from difficulties, and they ‘have *all failed in their designs*.—The subject is ‘*beyond the reach of the human mind*.’ After discarding the system of SOCINUS and his followers, which tends, not to elucidate, but to subvert religion; after rejecting the system of ARMINIUS, which grants fore-knowledge, but denies fore-appointment, and stating, that it is inconsistent with itself, that it does not coalesce with scripture, that it does not lessen the

‘way as natural knowledge is come at: by the continuance  
‘and progress of learning, and of liberty; and by particular  
‘persons attending to, comparing and pursuing, intimations  
‘scattered up and down it, which are overlooked and disre-  
‘garded by the generality of the world. For this is the way  
‘in which all improvements are made, by thoughtful men  
‘tracing on obscure hints, as it were, dropped us by nature  
‘accidentally, or which seem to come into our minds by chance.  
‘Nor is it at all incredible that a book, which has been so long  
‘in the possession of mankind, should contain many truths as  
‘yet undiscovered. For, all the same phenomena, and the  
‘same faculties of investigation, from which great discoveries  
‘in natural knowledge have been made in the present and last  
‘age, were equally in the possession of mankind, several  
‘thousand years before.’ — BUTLER’S *Analogy*, p. 212.  
‘Edit. 1802.



difficulties, by casting any light on the ways of providence, by filling up any of the depths which absorb our imperfect reason, and, in a word, is subject to the very *same* perplexities as that of predestination; the author, in the mean time, conceding *to* (shall I say?) or urging *against* the Arminian system, that ‘to *foresee* and to *fore-appoint* in God is only *one and the same thing*:’—after renouncing the system of the SUPRALAPSARIANS, which, according to him, states, that God resolved to punish such and such persons, not because he foresaw they would sin, but he resolved that they should sin that he might damn them:—after discrediting all these systems, and explaining in a few words that of the Reformed Churches,—he proposes a number of questions against the doctrine of *Predestination* as commonly espoused, and answers them by an appeal to some passages of scripture, in the usual way. He then proceeds:—‘After all  
‘these questions, should you appeal to our con-  
‘sciences to know whether our own answers  
‘*fully satisfy ourselves*; whether our arguments  
‘may not be *turned against us*; whether the  
‘objections we have made against others *do not*  
‘*seem to conclude against ourselves*; and whether  
‘the system we have proposed to you appear to  
‘ourselves *free from difficulty*; to this we reply  
‘—by putting our finger upon our mouth: *we*  
‘*acknowledge our ignorance*. — *The decree is*

‘ *impenetrable*. The book of life is sealed.—A  
‘ little less *speculation* and more practice. Let us  
‘ become less *curious*, and try to be more holy.  
‘ Let us leave God to *arrange his own decrees*,  
‘ and for our parts let us arrange our actions,  
‘ and regulate our lives.—This subject addresses  
‘ itself to you, *rash* divine, you who perplex  
‘ your mind by trying to comprehend *incompre-*  
‘ *hensible* truths; to you whose *audacious* dispo-  
‘ sition obliges you to run into one of these  
‘ two extremes, either to embrace error, or to  
‘ *render truth doubtful* by the *manner of explain-*  
‘ *ing* it. For understand, my brethren, the man  
‘ who rejects a truth *because* he cannot compre-  
‘ hend it, and he who would fully comprehend  
‘ *before* he receives it, both sin from the same  
‘ principle; neither understands the limits of  
‘ the human mind. These two extremes are  
‘ alike dangerous. Certainly, on the one hand,  
‘ we must be very rash, we must entertain very  
‘ diminutive ideas of an infinite God, we must  
‘ be very little versed in science, to admit only  
‘ principles which have no difficulty, and to  
‘ regard the depth of a subject as a character of  
‘ falsehood. What! a miserable creature, an  
‘ ignorant creature, a creature that doth not  
‘ know itself, would know the decrees of God,  
‘ and reject them if they be unfathomable! But,  
‘ on the other hand, we must have very narrow  
‘ views, we must have a very weak mind, we

‘ must know very little of the designs of God,  
‘ not to feel any difficulty, to find every thing  
‘ clear, not to *suspend* our judgment upon *any*  
‘ *thing*, to pretend not only to perceive the *truth*  
‘ of a mystery but to go to the *bottom* of it.  
‘ Insignificant man! feel thy diminutiveness.  
‘ Cover thyself with dust, and learn of the  
‘ greatest of divines to stop where you ought  
‘ to stop, and to cry on the brink of the ocean,  
“ *O the depth!*”\*

I was induced to transcribe these passages, both as they are calculated to operate as a useful caution to myself, and to admonish my readers, that if they do not find all their doubts and scruples removed in the following pages, respecting some “*adorable depths*,” they may be prepared to make due allowances. And happy will it be for the author and the reader, when a consciousness of ignorance, and of the limits assigned to the human understanding, conducts to devout adoration. This is true wisdom. From the very ruins of our nature, by adopting such a method, we are enabled to educe profit, and to apply to the best advantage the most humiliating considerations. He who thus ‘humbleth himself, shall be exalted.’ By feeling and confessing before God our nothingness, an

\* SAURIN’S Sermons. Vol. v. Ser. xi.

ascending step is gained in religious proficiency; and without such a temper of mind no one can have an experimental pledge of his ever attaining the perfection of his nature.

On the quotations from SAURIN many observations might be made in evidence that he was not a little embarrassed, in consequence of some erroneous assumptions, and from his confounding the difficulty of ascertaining *a priori* the *order* of divine decrees with their ascertainable *objects*, by reasoning *a posteriori*. The question, whether moral evils be *objects* of divine decrees, is of a nature essentially different from an enquiry into the *order* of the divine decrees; with which, however, the persons whom he deemed reprehensible almost exclusively, and very unprofitably, perplexed themselves and others. This last being the general question agitated by ‘orthodox and heterodox’ divines, it is no wonder that they should have ‘all failed in their designs;’ and that the subject should be pronounced ‘beyond the reach of the human mind.’ And while the author, (with the common body of his reformed brethren) maintained, that ‘to foresee and to fore-appoint in God is only one and the same thing,’ it would indeed be matter of surprise if their own solutions of certain questions, should ‘fully satisfy themselves.’ On that supposition,

assuredly, their answers might be 'turned against themselves,' and there was good reason why the author should confess in their name, 'we acknowledge our ignorance—the decree is impe- netrable.' For 'insignificant man' to attempt a definitive 'arrangement of the divine decrees,' may be well pronounced 'rash' and 'audacious.' Similar observations might be made, were it needful, on other parts of the quotations. The sentiment, however, before adverted to, must not be passed over without further notice, because it appears to lie at the root of the difficulties he suggests, and because it stands immediately connected with my present design.

'To *foresee* and to *fore-appoint* in God is only 'one and the same thing.' This assertion, equally bold and unguarded, appears to me but little short of an open violation of the cautions which the author zealously recommends. At any rate, it shews plainly that his mind was greatly perplexed on the subjects of prescience and decree, and on the mode of reconciling them; a remark which may be extended to Archbishop LEIGHTON, as appears from several expressions contained in the above cited Lecture. And, indeed, they both uttered a language very much in vogue, even among the orthodox, and which was readily espoused by their opponents as their



strongest objection against the reformed doctrine of Predestination. This assumption lying as an insurmountable difficulty in their way, and forming an impregnable barrier against clear and distinct ideas, whereby their own minds might be satisfied, was, doubtless, the reason why they spoke so strongly in dissuading others from such investigations. If, indeed, they assumed that there is no medium between *decretive intention* and *chance* in any event whatever, it is not difficult to perceive why they shuddered at the consequence of prosecuting the enquiry. Excellent and illustrious as these men were in other respects, it does not appear that their views on this topic were either consistent or satisfactory to themselves.

On entering a dark passage we step fearfully, and inculcate caution on those who follow us; but if light be admitted, we walk forward with confidence and pleasure. Thus when the mind is enabled satisfactorily to perceive that the GOOD in the created universe is foreseen because divinely *purposed*, and, with equal evidence, that the EVIL is foreseen in a negative principle as an adequate cause of *defectibility*, and therefore cannot be any object of decree, although under the infinitely wise direction and controul of divine benevolence;—when the mind is thus enlightened, all ground of alarm is removed,

chance is out of the question, and the character of God appears in a light so amiable as to afford a rational confidence and inexpressible delight. The supposition that the CAUSE of *liability* to moral evil, is positive, or the effect of decree, energy, or efficiency,—is demonstrably an incompatible idea; and it is equally plain (as will be shewn in its proper place) that no decree is *capable* of preventing a negative cause from being *essentially related* to a limited existence; so that a decree cannot be necessary in order to account for a limited and defective mode of operation. But moral evil, it can be shewn, is a defective mode of operation by a being of limited existence; therefore moral evil, in all possible degrees, may be foreseen without being fore-appointed. To decree an event, or the manner of an event, is to assign it a positive and effective cause; but moral evil, it may be proved, is a NEGATIVE OR DEFECTIVE MANNER of operation; therefore, while the operation itself is decreed, its *defective* manner no more requires a decree, than the *limitation* by which it is occasioned. And this limitation of a created nature, which is not the effect of *will*, as may be abundantly substantiated, is necessarily involved in the demonstration of *one infinite first cause*. As sure as this grand principle is true, every other nature *must* be limited. Had SAURIN paid due attention to this radical subject, he could never

have asserted, in his indiscriminate manner, that 'to foresee and to fore-appoint in God is one 'and the same thing,' and thereby afforded a plausible argument to all objectors against both predestination and all divine decrees, on account of the horrible consequences implicated in his assertion.

And now before I launch with my small bark into this sea of difficulties, where so many dangerous rocks abound on which greater and stronger vessels than mine have been wrecked; I would make a solemn pause, and for a few moments indulge that disposition to which all theological and moral investigations ought to be subservient.—Contemplating the blessed God, I behold an ocean unfathomable and without shore! But what is man? 'Canst thou,' worm of the earth, 'by searching find out God?' 'Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?' a perfection 'high as heaven; what 'canst thou do?' a perfection 'deeper than hell; 'what canst thou know? There is no searching 'of his understanding.' It is no wonder that my conceptions of an infinite Spirit, and of his transcendent properties, should be inadequate; for it is but a 'small portion of his ways' I can understand. And if his *ways* are 'past finding 'out,' if his expressed judgments are unsearchable, what must be his secret counsels? 'Who

‘hath known the mind of the Lord? or who  
‘hath been his counsellor? For of him, and  
‘through him, and to him are all things. To  
‘whom be glory for ever.’

Yet, ‘that the soul be *without knowledge*, it is  
‘not good.’ I am told, as the language of en-  
couragement from the great Supreme, that ‘a  
‘wise man will increase learning;’ and that ‘a  
‘man of understanding shall attain unto wise  
‘counsels.’ Ought I then to exclude myself  
from being interested in the benevolent address  
from heaven? “My son, if thou wilt receive  
my words, and hide my commandments with  
thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom,  
and apply thine heart to understanding: yea,  
if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up  
thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest  
her as silver, and searchest for her, as for hid  
treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear  
of the Lord, and *find the knowledge of God*.  
For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth  
cometh knowledge and understanding. He  
layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous; he  
is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He  
keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth  
the way of his saints. Then shalt thou *under-  
stand righteousness, and judgment, and equity;  
yea, every good path*.” I am assured by an in-  
fallible oracle of truth and wisdom, that to

‘*know* the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom ‘he hath sent, is *life eternal*.’ His children are authorized to hope for ‘an unction from the ‘Holy One,’ that they may know the indications of his will. Those who *go on to fear the Lord*, may hope to be favoured with a secret unknown to others; and he has promised to *shew them his covenant*.\*

Why am I endowed with intellect and reason, if not for the purpose of contemplating, with attention and reverence, the glorious nature and perfections of my Maker, the wonderful works of his goodness, wisdom, and power, the sublime movements of his providence, and the sublimer operations of his Grace? How shall I *intelligently* adore, and love, and serve, that God, of whose Equity as a Governor, and of whose Pre-rogative as a Benefactor, I have no settled conceptions? This I clearly understand, that my Creator, the self-existent, independent, and omnipotent First Cause, is ALL, and that I am as NOTHING. On this condition alone can I hope for blissful existence—that I consider myself as nothing and vanity in his presence. The moment I begin to apprehend myself to be something *without* him, I stand condemned. Let me, then, for a few minutes of that ‘vain

\* Psalm xxv. 14.



‘life which passeth as a shadow,’ withdraw from created scenes, adore in solemn silence, and be wholly absorbed in the greatness of my Creator. No mental state can be more productive of real enjoyment than this kind of self-annihilation, or more conformable to eternal rectitude and reason.—Only divine grace can subdue the swellings and proud boastings of the human heart. When the creature claims any power, whether of the will or of any other faculty, to do the least *good*, without the aid of Him who said, ‘Without me ye can do nothing,’ he elevates an *idol*, and presents it with incense. This idol is *self*. O vanity, O nothing, how blind art thou to thy nature! Thou canst no more act well without God, in proud disdain of his aid, than thou canst form a living body, or create an active soul. What good do I possess, with which he did not furnish me? Or what good have I done, to which he did not prompt, and in which he did not assist me? O my Creator, Saviour, and Sanctifier, preserve me from the evil to which every human being is liable, but from which, by gracious influence, thou canst effectually defend me. I beseech thee, O thou God of Truth, suffer no falsehood of any kind to drop from my pen to thy dishonour, whilst, after the example of thy faithful servants in former periods, I attempt to disprove the impious accusation, and to remove the foul calumny, which are

virtually uttered by too many—‘ If God has  
‘ decreed to bestow *more grace* upon one, than  
‘ upon another, *his ways are not equal*: if we have  
‘ no sufficient power, without his influence, to  
‘ convert ourselves, *why doth he yet find fault?*—  
Let this effort, sincerely intended, however  
weak, stand as a monument for God, to testify  
against the self-idolatry of every creature.

## SECT. II.

*Concerning the Nature and Use of Scriptural Authority,  
and of Scriptural Evidence.*

THE whole body of modern Jews,—excepting perhaps some deistic or atheistic individuals who have not renounced the name, but still preposterously glory in their descent from Abraham,—acknowledge, as their forefathers for many ages have done, the binding authority of oral traditions derived from Moses. These were committed to writing by learned Rabbins, and under the term *Mischna*, are contained in the *Talmuds* of Jerusalem and of Babylon, accompanied with a *Gemara*, or supplemental commentary, which completes the system. In their estimation, compared with the Old Testament, those most absurd of all compositions are of paramount authority. By these traditional chains the Rabbins keep their deluded votaries in the most abject slavery through successive generations; while texts of scripture, however appropriate and pointed, and the most fair and conclusive deductions from them, are annihilated in their view by any gloss, however ridiculous, produced as the tradition of their ancestors. The *dictum* of a ‘Rabbi’ goes much further with them,

than the testimony of Moses or the Prophets; and thus they 'transgress the commandment 'of God,' and, as far they are able, 'make it of 'no effect.'

But it is a lamentable fact, that a large proportion of persons in the visible church of Christ, closely imitate the example of the Jews in this respect. The church of Rome, in particular, confides in traditions as of equal authority with the inspired volume, and assumes that Christians are under the highest obligation to observe them. They have not, indeed, collected these fragments into a regular system, like the Jewish Talmuds; but they assert, that their church is in possession of laws and customs, doctrines and directions, not indeed contained in the Bible, but derived from the apostles by uninterrupted succession: and they further pretend that of these apostolical traditions they are, exclusively, the appointed depositaries. Besides, they produce *ecclesiastical* traditions, consisting of canons and statutes; or the laws, regulations, and decrees of councils, the mandates of the Popes, &c. as objects of no small veneration. Some of their traditions are sought from the writings of the sainted Fathers of the church, though not found in the scriptures; and others are unwritten, but preserved by the Roman church inviolate: but all of them,

they maintain, are binding upon the consciences of men; and to disregard them, as enjoined by the church, is to forfeit salvation.

If it be asked, how are the ignorant and illiterate to be made acquainted with so huge a mass of learned lumber, the knowledge of which however must be obtained, under pain of exclusion from the favour and family of God, the answer is, they commit the care of their souls and their eternal salvation to the Priests, who undertake to acquaint them with every thing needful both in the scriptures and the traditions. Submission to *their* authority, is the same as submission to that of the church, councils and popes; which, again, is the same as the authority of God. The way therefore to avoid everlasting damnation, according to them, is to yield implicitly to the direction of the priest, who has at once 'the key of knowledge' and of heaven. It is of no moment what our consciences, our senses, our reason, or the inspired scriptures declare to the contrary: the priest is authorized by the church, and the church *cannot* err. As God gave to Christ authority over men, so Christ communicated to St. Peter authority over the church; and as St. Peter transmitted his prerogative to the first bishop of Rome, so the first bishop of Rome transmitted it to his successors in office to the end of time. The Roman



pontiff, therefore, is infallible; and infallible are all the ecclesiastical councils which he sanctions, and all the mandates which he issues. And as he is the head of the church, every member of it is as sure of ultimate felicity as himself. But out of the church there is no salvation; all others are heretics—doomed to perdition, because they will not submit to the authority of the church, that is, of God.

Monstrous and absurd, however, as this ecclesiastical system appears to the view of a Protestant, in connexion with its horrid abuses; yet, abstracted from these abuses, there is something plausible in the scheme. IF God, who is the ultimate source of authority, has delegated this to the church, and the church to the priest; to disobey the priest is to rebel against God; and how can such rebels be saved? This enormous pile of consequences they affect to found on express passages of scripture; not indeed upon the spirit but upon the letter of them. A few verbal criticisms, in defiance of common sense and right reason, a few traditionary maxims, however preposterous and unfounded, serve as a basis for the whole hierarchy. To question, or even to examine these claims, is heresy; and so is every interpretation of scripture not authorized by the church. Never was a scheme, detached from its hideous abuses,

more imposingly congenial to degraded nature, or more effectual to precipitate human minds into ignorance, superstition, and misery. Had these ecclesiastical tyrants preserved the bounds of even a selfish policy, few of the reformers, perhaps, would have suspected the authority itself. Had it been employed to promote order and piety, they could have endured it; they could have allowed the foundation of Popery, if the superstructure had been rather more becoming; they would not have renounced the essence, had the form been less odious,

Hence the labour of the first reformers was not so much to examine, expose, and exchange the popish *foundation*, as to demolish the superstructure, and to erect upon the ancient basis something more conformable to the inspired code. Still the actual existence of authority to compel a uniformity of creed and worship, provided these were scriptural, was almost universally assumed as an uncontroverted principle. And the chief dispute was where this authority should reside. The Protestants replied not in the Pope, not in the church of Rome, not in any foreign power, but in the ecclesiastical, or the civil dignitaries, or in the union of both, in each country. But every argument directed against the assumed basis, the very essence of Popery, was equally directed against themselves.

Grant that God has given them authority to compel their fellow Christians in religious concerns,—to adopt a creed however scriptural, and a worship however suitable,—the antichristian *principle* is secure, and a wide door is opened for the admission of all its extravagancies, superstitions, and bloody persecutions. Human authority, supposes human persons, and these are not only changeable but perpetually changing. What by them is pronounced lawful and scriptural in one period, is declared at another to be unlawful and unscriptural; what is now judged proper and instructive, will soon be pronounced unbecoming and hostile to the best interests of religion.

These destructive consequences and glaring absurdities, with which ecclesiastical history abounds, cannot be avoided, unless the Christian church be regarded, as it was in the apostolic age, as a *voluntary society* taking the SACRED SCRIPTURES as its *only* directory, relative to faith, worship, and practice. And for the same reason that *one* body of people has authority from the divine oracles to do this, all *others* are entitled to the like privilege. If any adopt a wrong creed, an unedifying mode of worship, or any customs or conduct in religion not interfering with *civil order*, to their own Master in heaven they are amenable;—but not to any

self-constituted human authority. To resign this Christian liberty, is to measure back our steps to Rome, and to prepare another scaffold for the blood of the innocent. To suppose that God has authorized some men to *impose* a system of doctrines, and an order of worship upon others, is no less absurd and impious, than to suppose that he has committed the consciences of a multitude of immortal beings to the disposal of a priest. The *authority* in each case is equally *gratuitous*, and equally inconsistent with the nature of revealed religion. The Bible is professedly addressed to every man alike; and to its divine Author exclusively is each accountable for his use or neglect of its contents. There we may learn what a Christian church is, what we are to believe, and what worship and religious conduct God requires.

Consistent Christians renounce not only Jewish and Papal traditions, and the authority of popes, councils, and human legislators of whatever country or name, in reference to religion, as to what they are to believe and how they are to worship God; but likewise all *compulsive* power in the very communion with which they are connected, except that of *exclusion*, when they appear to the majority of the body not to answer the design for which they are voluntarily associated. But this

expulsion leaves them at liberty to unite with any other church that may choose to receive them. To establish coercive compliance instead of expulsion, or to deny full liberty to any man to choose his own church, and to every church the same liberty of choosing or expelling its own members, is the very essence of Popery. To assume that the church is but one associate body, in contradistinction to several communities all under one head, Jesus Christ, is subversive of the true meaning of scripture, and of the real nature of Christ's kingdom on earth; it is incompatible with all rational principles of society, and pregnant with the most enormous abuses. Nor is there *any evidence* for concluding that uniformity would be *compulsively* enjoined, were the Messiah to reign upon earth personally visible among men. How presumptuous then must it be for any to arrogate to themselves in his name, that which the nature of his kingdom (not to insist on his own actual conduct while on earth) forbids us to suppose he would himself exercise. The government of the church is not political but moral; and the very nature of moral government implies *liberty*, or freedom from temporal constraint and compulsion. The Jews, indeed, were under a Theocracy, including a *political* society, and in that respect rebellion against divine laws was attended with corporal punishments; but the



Christian church, as the declarations and examples of the New Testament fully evince, is of a character essentially different, being a voluntary society of disciples purely and exclusively *moral* in its constitution and sanctions.

Protestants in general, and all consistent Christians, renounce also the authority of all *Apochryphal* writings, though often bound up with our Bibles, and though they contain many maxims of wisdom, many beautiful lessons of morality, and some valuable historical information. And in the same class they justly place the writings of the apostolical and subsequent *Fathers* of the Christian church, and, in short, all *human* compositions of every age and of every kind. We maintain, on the firmest ground, that the BIBLE, the canonical books of the Old and New Testament, have these *criteria*; they are given by *inspiration* of God,—and were *designed* for the use of mankind to the end of time. Every writing that bears these marks is canonical; but no other. This is not the place for producing arguments to prove that every book in our canon corresponds to these criteria; nor is it necessary, because it has been often done professedly and at large. All others are rejected because they do not answer to a standard so evidently equitable. Hence, for instance, all *Traditions* are excluded, even could they be

proved to be delivered by Moses or the apostles when under immediate inspiration; because they want the criterion of being *designed* for the perpetual use of mankind. And the same might be said of any recorded sermon, discourse, or private letter of an apostle, though he were divinely inspired at the time of communicating his thoughts. Were the autograph of an apostolic epistle discovered, and proved to be so beyond all reasonable doubt, it could not stand as *authoritative* in Christ's church. For divine truth however pure, and inspiration however high, without the evidence of a writing being *designed* by infinite wisdom for the standing use of the church, can never form a part of the sacred canon, though it might contain important information, or eminently conduce to piety. How much less credit, therefore, is due to the authority of pretended modern inspirations! If indeed they could be proved genuine, still they would have no force to bind the consciences of Christ's disciples. A contrary opinion, I am aware, has but too generally prevailed—that individual inspiration, supposing its reality, *ought* to reduce the consciences of others to subjection: but this I cannot help regarding as pernicious, because the admission of such authority implies the insufficiency of scripture to answer the end for which it was bestowed, and is therefore an

impeachment of supreme wisdom; not to mention that it is fraught with the most perilous consequences in society. The BIBLE, in short, is our only authoritative rule, and was given by the all-wise God as our infallible directory to truth, to holiness, and to heaven. The sacred canon being completed by the Revelation given to the Apostle John, nothing more is now to be expected, as possessing canonical authority for the use of the church of God. It has, therefore, become the great duty of each individual, to 'mark, learn, and inwardly digest' the sacred volume; to form the best judgment he can of its real meaning, and from it to derive his creed, his mode of worship, and his rules of discipline. Those who adopt similar views on these leading points, are authorized, by the God of the Bible and the Lord of conscience, to form themselves into distinct societies for mutual and progressive improvement, to exhibit 'the word of life,' and to promote the salvation of men.

Had the New Testament been addressed to persons in authority, ecclesiastical or civil, containing directions how *they* should exercise their legislative wisdom and prudence, their discretion and power, accompanied with a declaration that their dependants should be constrained to submit to their explanations, there would have

been some pretence for enforcing uniformity of faith and worship. But in the proportion that this was an evident *part* of its contents, would have been the suspicion of its not being as a *whole* a code of religion from a divine moral Governor, but a political collusion, 'a cunningly devised fable,' to keep the minds of the many in subjection to the few. If the Catholic interpretation on this head could be substantiated from the New Testament, this would form a stronger objection to its divine authority than any thing that the infidel has ever urged. And, in point of fact, the assumption that this authority is actually contained in the New Testament, has been a prolific source of infidelity. In this conclusion, that the scriptures delegate to persons in office the power of giving an authoritative interpretation of scripture, and a power of compelling uniformity in matters of religion, they entrench themselves; inferring, that a religion so inconsistent with the nature of moral government cannot originate from God. Thus from one extreme, contemplated with deserved disgust, they proceed to another, without examining the sacred writings in order to ascertain whether their conclusion has not been rash and groundless. Were such characters sufficiently upright and ingenuous, and had they a real affection to essential and eternal truth, they would perceive nothing in those writings but

what flows from infinite Wisdom, Benevolence and Equity. They would discover that a pretended authority in some Christians to compel others to conform to their wishes, is the deduction of sophistry ; but a deduction pertinaciously adhered to, because found convenient in politics for the support of extended power. I am far from intending to insinuate by these remarks, that it is not the duty and the wise policy of civil governments to countenance and encourage what they believe to be the purest religion. What I intend to assert is, that they have no delegated authority to adopt compulsive measures, in *any* case, under a pretence of promoting uniformity. It is fully admissible moreover, that persons, at the head of any civil government, are authorized to adopt their own system of religion, and to promote that system by arguments, by private bounties, or by any means they please which do not encroach on the liberties of others. Whether their system and proceedings are *just* in the sight of God, is a distinct consideration. While no human power has a right to interfere with them, they are accountable to God for the use they make of their own abilities and influence.

The dispute respecting a delegated authority to enforce uniformity in creeds, worship, and discipline, relates not so much to the *circum-*



*stantials* as to the *nature* of Christianity. The proper question is not, whether a creed be scriptural, and therefore may be safely enforced upon the multitude, but whether the nature, the real genius of Christianity, admits of such enforcement? whether the idea be not subversive of itself, the conclusion sophistical to such a degree as to discredit the very existence of a religion declared to be from God? and whether the two claims be not so absolutely incompatible, that both cannot possibly be true? The first reformers, LUTHER, CALVIN, ZUINGLIUS, KNOX, and others, were, in the first instance, roused by the vicious *exercise* of power, the sale of indulgencies, the venality and profligacy of the clerical orders, and the like, little doubting the *propriety* of well-directed ecclesiastical claims, and the right of princes to enforce *true* religion. Their arguments were popular, and well adapted to awaken from their lethargy a people nurtured in ignorance and superstition. The wisdom of providence was visible in directing their zeal and courage against glaring enormities, with which the most illiterate might well be shocked. Had they applied their attention to the question of authority itself, and its incompatibility with the nature of the Christian religion, their reasoning would have been lost upon the multitude who were not qualified to judge of radical truths, and whose

regard could be obtained only to obvious abuses of power, and to the plainest doctrines of salvation.

That the views of the first reformers were very imperfect on the subject of authority in matters of religion, is evident from their subsequent conduct. They still considered councils, synods, and ecclesiastical assemblies, as invested with a plenitude of power to enact laws for the reformed, and to sanction them by compulsive measures, even to capital punishments! Thus the pestiferous branches of Popery were lopped off, while the root and stem of it were preserved, from which might hereafter proceed, even among the reformed churches, vigorous shoots of the same noxious quality. It is admitted that personal piety appeared in its radiant lustre, compared with monkish pretensions to sanctity. Individual religious excellencies have been displayed in denominations greatly dissimilar—the Romish communion not excepted. But personal worth can never sanctify false principles; nor can the assumption of such principles constitute any part of personal worth.

The conclusion to which these observations conducts us is obvious—that no Christian can *consistently* maintain the authority of *scripture* in religion, and the authority of *men* at the same time. And this will further appear from

the consideration of the very nature of *faith*, in reference to the scriptures as a divine revelation. For why does a person consistently give credit to the scriptures? Is it not because of the *infallibility* of the Author? It is not merely because the scriptures contain important *truths*, for to this distinction many other writings are entitled; but because the divine Legislator is incapable of error, and because their authority cannot be disputed by the subjects of his government, without incurring his righteous displeasure. Any body of men, therefore, claiming submission to their own authority, in religious concerns, are bound to produce credentials of their infallibility, otherwise their claims deserve no regard. But all human authority is fallible, because the views of men, by which it is directed, may be right, or may be wrong. Human minds, the supposed interpreters of truth and right, are not only mutable, but are often actually changing. If a Christian, therefore, is to submit his judgment and conscience to human fallible authority, how is it possible for him to retain his *faith* in that which is infallible? And even where nothing is required by men contrary to scripture, this is merely *accidental*; the *nature* of the claim continuing precisely the same. If our faith in truths contained in any human composition be not ultimately fixed on the authority of God, in whose revealed will

they are included, it is a faith merely human. Divine faith, such as God demands for his testimony, cannot be denied without exposure to his anger: and to retain this faith steadfastly, is absolutely incompatible with an admission of any other claim. Submission to these different requirements can no more co-exist, than supreme deference to the commands of two masters. 'One is our Master,' all others are brethren, fellow disciples, fellow subjects. Peter had no more legal power to compel Paul, than Paul had to compel Peter. Nor can any *civil* distinction among Christ's disciples alter the case, without exchanging divine for human authority, and preferring the latter to the former; in a word, without abandoning an eternal rock for the "sand and stubble" of human frailty.

The governors of the Roman church had perspicacity enough to discover the utter incompatibility of implicit submission to two authorities, the one infallible, and the other fallible; and therefore, in order to preserve consistency, they maintain the infallibility of the church: thus identifying the "rock" and the "sand." This high prerogative of the church, however, they ascribe to a divine promise, that the church, including its governors, should be 'led into all truth.' This, indeed, has the appearance of consistency; but if closely

examined, what does it imply less than a delegation to mortals of an incommunicable divine attribute? It may be argued, that the apostles were frail mortals, and yet to their canonical writings we attach infallible authority; why then may not the same infallibility belong to their successors in office to the end of time? This specious argument is nothing but a profound sophism. The property of infallibility cannot, in the nature of things, belong to any other besides that God by the influence of whose Holy Spirit the prophets and apostles delivered their testimony: nor could their testimony have any claim on our implicit belief beyond the evidence they gave of their being under the influence of that infallible guide. But an inference drawn from a *supposed* promise of infallible legal power from heaven continuing in the church, is only a human interpretation; and this necessarily sinks the pretended authority to the level of *fallibility*, and therefore the argument subverts itself. It implies, besides, an addition to the canonical authority of scripture, and an impious impeachment of its sufficiency to point out the way to God, to religious truth, to duty, and to heaven.

Having considered the *authority* contained in the sacred writings, compared with other claims, we proceed to contemplate the nature



and extent of *scriptural evidence* in reference to religion and morals. For this purpose, it will be expedient to state and confirm the proper character of the scriptures themselves, and what limits are to be assigned to the information they contain. What we state concerning them is, that they are the fruit of unerring inspiration—that they express the will of God to men—that, being inspired, all they contain is true—that nothing which is really inconsistent with these records can be true—that they contain every truth it concerns us to know relating to salvation from sin and misery—and, finally, that they are the designed standard of religious truth.

When we say that the scriptures are the fruit of unerring *inspiration*, we mean, that holy men were enlightened, instructed, and powerfully moved by the Holy Spirit, to communicate to mankind what they substantially contain: hence we call the Bible ‘the volume ‘of Inspiration,’ or ‘the inspired volume.’ When we say, that the scriptures express the *will* of God, we mean, that, as thus inspired, they must of course announce the will of him whose inspiration gave them existence; for it is not supposable, that inspiration and will can be separated: hence we denominate the scriptures ‘the revealed will of God.’ When we declare,

that all they contain is *true*, we intend, that they contain nothing of importance, rightly understood, which is either false, or contradictory: for, whatever is divinely inspired must have the character of truth, and all truth is consistent;—the will of God never contradicts itself: hence we denominate the Bible ‘the *Scriptures of Truth.*’ When we declare, that nothing which is *inconsistent* with scripture can be true, we intend, that no sentiment, no assertion can be in all respects a verity, however plausible *a priori*, if it be really irreconcilable with the sacred oracles accurately compared and interpreted.

We further assert, that the scriptures contain every truth it concerns us to know relating to *salvation*. The grand end for which holy men were inspired, as the organs of the divine will, referred, either directly or indirectly, to this momentous object; an object therefore for which their writings must be fully adequate: hence the Bible, and especially the New Testament, may be styled ‘the word of Salvation.’ When we assert that the scriptures are the *standard* of religious truth, our meaning is, that every religious doctrine or sentiment should be brought to them as a *test*, that what is inconsistent with them should be rejected, and what harmonizes with them should be received.

If the preceding particulars, respecting a divine revelation, may be considered as axioms in Christian theology, relating to evidence; it is obvious that the Christian scriptures, whose claims to inspiration are so decidedly superior to all others, (as has been often proved,) must be a treasure incalculably precious. It likewise follows, that it is the imperious duty of every man, who has access to these records, to examine their contents with care, humility, and impartiality, lest they should be found a treasure in the possession of ignorance and folly. ‘Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?’\* At the same time, it behoves us to guard against mistakes and false deductions, under an appearance of honouring the sacred books. By ascribing to these holy writings what they do not claim, we encourage and promote infidelity. Though the scriptures are comprehensive to a degree truly wonderful, yet they do not expressly enunciate every thing that God wills; for the Bible is not a record of all the divine decrees. Who can question that there are countless myriads of divinely purposed operations which are not explicitly related in this hallowed volume? Who would expect to find in it all the events of history, natural, civil,

\* Prov. xvii. 16.

and ecclesiastical? Replete as it is with wisdom, it would be repugnant to common sense to imagine it contained the principles and rules of all the arts invented by mankind, that it was a cyclopædia of the sciences, a vocabulary of all languages, and a store-house of universal literature. Who can suppose that a volume of revealed religion is the only source from which can be derived the axioms and demonstrations of mathematical and metaphysical truths? How unreasonable to require in a book, because inspired, the rules of philosophizing, like those in Newton's *Principia*, logical axioms of true reasoning, or directions for detecting all classes of sophisms.

Some have imagined that there is no attainable *certainty* respecting good and evil, virtue and vice, their nature, desert, and ultimate causes respectively, but what is deduced from *explicit* scriptural evidence; and that whatever is not proved directly from the sacred pages, can be only *conjectural* knowledge. They appear to forget the endless and jarring *conjectures* of men respecting the genuine *sense* of scripture, on the most fundamental doctrines of Christianity, which their contradictory expositions testify. When they suppose that an attempt to establish the consistency of the moral character of God with the existence of moral evil, or to ascertain

its true origin from any other source of evidence besides the *testimony* of scripture, about the real import of which men are continually differing, is 'being wise above what is written;' they act a part very weak, to say the least, and which in some cases must appear very ridiculous. The evidence of scripture is given us for the obedience of *faith*; but not to confute the objections or the pretended reasons of infidels, in reference to the principles themselves on which the scriptures are founded.

However we, as Christians, may be satisfied with scriptural evidence, who would not either pity our weakness, or ridicule our folly, if we should attempt to convince a deist that his objections were *unreasonable*, by an appeal to scripture as a rule of decision? The objector would say,—One cause why I think your scriptures are not true is this; what they assert is not consistent with the principles of reason. In the view of Christians, the Old and New Testaments contain divine testimonies; and what they *positively* assert, in the true import of the assertion, we have just cause to believe is a truth from God. And as the scriptures were given to us with the express design of making us 'wise unto salvation,' we may be sure they are amply sufficient for *that* purpose. But the infidel or sceptic charges



them with containing unreasonable assertions sufficient to discredit their authority. Are we then to shrink from the debate, and to leave such persons to triumph in a supposed conquest, without exposing their weakness? Suppose an atheist argues against the being of a God, and he is confronted with this quotation, ‘ In ‘ the beginning God created the heavens and ‘ the earth,’ fortified with the maxim, ‘ We must ‘ not be wise above what is written;’ would he not regard it as a concession that we have no evidence for the being of a God, without begging the question in dispute, viz.—That there is such a being who has revealed his will to men? Ought we not to produce demonstrative evidence from principles of reason? May we not appeal to marks of design both in our own frame and in the world around us; or to metaphysical evidence, arguing from effects to a first intelligent cause? From the former, may we not urge the *infinite improbability* of so many signs of contrivance without a contriver? And from the latter, may we not conclusively demonstrate the *impossibility* of such a chain of effects as is obvious to every one, and which an atheist cannot deny, without ascending to a being who is uncaused? And if an atheistic sophist has recourse to logic and metaphysics, may not a theist turn upon him his own weapons?

The scriptures assert the *fact* of moral evil, in a variety of ways; what it is, and what it deserves. They also declare the *manner* of its entrance into our world. But captious sophists renounce their authority, and require evidence for what is asserted from principles of reason and equity. Is it then wrong, rather is it not strictly proper, to confront them on their own principles, and to shew that scriptural assertions on these interesting points are conformable to the highest reason? The Bible testifies that God is an equitable Governor of his rational creatures, that the Judge of the 'whole earth will do right,' and that he is a sovereign dispenser of his bounties. But an objector disdains this evidence as founded in scripture, and appeals to several supposed acts of unjustifiable partiality, towards persons or nations, as recorded there, and affects to discredit revelation on that account. Ought we not, therefore, to shew that his objections are founded in ignorance; that the very facts to which he appeals in justification of his unbelief, are perfectly consistent with Equity and Sovereignty, which are essential to the very nature of an infinitely perfect Being? And may not the necessary consequences implied in these grand truths be shewn in a similar way?

Suppose it were debated, What is the true system of the planetary world? Who would

think it sufficient to say, The Bible declares many things respecting our earth, the sun, the moon, and the starry heavens; it speaks of the sun rising and setting, but never of the earth as revolving around it, or turning on its own axis; let the Bible decide the question; and let us beware of being 'wise above what is written.' Such an appeal to scriptural evidence would be unsatisfactory not only to those who reject its authority, but also to those who regard it with the greatest reverence, provided there is found no positive evidence, ascertained with fairness, to which an appeal can be pertinently made. When any one contends that the Newtonian representation of the solar system is the only consistent one, are we to reproach him as 'wise above what is written,' because he does not deduce his conclusion from a divine testimony? If, indeed, the scripture professed to settle this point, and gave its decision against him, he would be obliged, in consistency, either to reject its authority or to renounce his conclusion. If it contain no decided testimony on the point, we may infer that the knowledge of it is not essential to salvation. There are, however, many branches of science, and innumerable parts and degrees of knowledge, highly conducive to the improvement of the mind, and friendly to true religion, which are no more professedly taught in the sacred oracles, than the laws of matter and motion.

But these things, it may be said, belong to *natural* philosophy. Let us then advert to matters of *right* and *wrong*, or, in a word, *Equity*. In a Christian country we profess that the holy scriptures are a sufficient rule of faith and practice. How is it, therefore, that in our deliberative assemblies, in parliament, at the bar, or in our courts of justice, every point concerning right and wrong is not settled by texts of scripture? Are we to charge our senators, counsellors, and judges, with being 'wise above what is written,' because they do not decide every cause by the sacred scriptures? Every one must see that such a mode would be impertinent. Even supposing that all present were true Christians, and disposed to give scriptural evidence its fullest weight, the difficulty would still remain, whether the passages produced were *applicable* to the point of right and wrong in debate. Scriptural evidence may be compared to experiments in philosophy, or to acts of legislation in municipal law. Nothing should be owned as a physical principle which contradicts well attested experiments; and nothing should be acknowledged as valid in law which contradicts a legislative decision. In like manner, nothing should be admitted as moral truth which opposes a divine testimony. But how absurd the inference, that nothing in civil life can be proved to be either right or wrong, but what can be substantiated by an act of par-

liament—that there is no truth in physics but what can be subjected to actual experiment—or, that there is neither truth nor error in morals, but what can be proved from divine testimony!

I am apprehensive that the sentiment conveyed by the following paragraph, is not sufficiently considered by Christians, and even by Protestants. It is the language of one, however, on whom persons of different denominations have agreed to bestow the epithet ‘judicious.’ The ‘testimonies of God,’ observes HOOKER, ‘are all sufficient unto that end for which they were given. Therefore, accordingly, we do receive them; we do not think that God hath omitted any thing needful unto his purpose, and left his intent to be accomplished by our devisings. What the scripture *purposeth*, the same in all points it doth perform. Howbeit, that here we swerve not in judgment, one thing especially we must observe, namely, that the absolute perfection of scripture is seen by relation unto that end whereunto it tendeth.\*—‘St. AUGUSTINE was resolute in points of Christianity to credit none, how godly and learned soever he were, unless he confirmed his sentence by the scrip-

\* HOOKER’S Eccl. Pol. B. II. § 8.



'tures, or by some reason not contrary to them.  
 'Let them, then, with Saint AUGUSTINE, reject  
 'and condemn that which is not grounded either  
 'on the scripture, or on some reason not con-  
 'trary to scripture, and we are ready to give  
 'them our hands in token of friendly consent  
 'with them.\* Saint Paul observes, 'We can  
 'do nothing against the truth, but for the  
 'truth.† Let any thing be shewn to be *against*  
 the truth of revelation, and it is a sufficient  
 reason, among Christians, why it should be  
 renounced. CHILLINGWORTH's maxim is, 'The  
 'Bible *only* is the religion of Protestants,'—the  
 Bible 'only,' as opposed to the bible *and tra-*  
*dition*; or to the exclusion of ecclesiastical  
 canons, and all other human authority in reli-  
 gion; but not as opposed to the evidence of  
 natural dictates or scientific conclusions,—for  
 truth can never contradict itself. And this is  
 one reason why we reject transubstantiation,  
 because that interpretation of scripture which is  
 urged by Popish authors in its defence, is incon-  
 sistent with sound philosophy and the dictates  
 of common sense. Scriptural evidence is both  
 positive and corrective, as far as it goes, and  
 conducts the believer to salvation; but it does  
 not exclude all other evidence. Many things in  
 ethics, as well as in physics, are demonstrable

\* HOOKER's Eccl. Pol. B. II. § 4.    † 2 Cor. xiii. 8.

truths, which never could have been ascertained by the Bible only.

The holy scriptures are wisely silent about such things as were not *intended* to be explained by them; and we may infer from that silence, that *divine faith* is not required; for, on the supposition, there is no divine testimony concerning them. For instance, we are not required to believe on the *testimony* of God, that the earth moves round the sun; but the evidence of this fact being clear from other sources of information, we may safely conclude that it is not contrary to revealed truth; because no conjectural interpretation of scripture can be paramount to this evidence. The scriptures, however, contain principles so comprehensive, as *virtually* to include all truth. For they testify of God, his nature and perfections, whence all truth flows; and of CREATURES, as deriving their existence, laws, operations, and excellencies from him, and as universally dependent upon him. Were the question put, therefore,—What is the ultimate cause of gravitation? we may confidently assert, as what is *virtually* included in revelation, that it is not an *independent* principle. The natural philosopher, whose province it is to enquire into second causes, may indeed say, that he is ignorant of the cause of gravitation; but a divine

or a moralist, who enquires after primary or ultimate causes, may safely ascribe it to God, to whose energy all matter and motion, and all their properties, are finally reducible. This conclusion is implied in just notions of God as taught us in the holy scriptures; but to shew how the conclusion follows may require a logical or a metaphysical train of evidence.

The scriptures clearly ascribe all *good* to GOD, and all *moral evil* to OURSELVES; and so far our faith in the divine testimony is demanded. But if any reject the obligations of faith, and appeal to principles of reason, he may be met with metaphysical and logical demonstrations of the same truth. By so doing, we do not abandon the evidence of divine testimony, but superadd the other kind of evidence for the conviction of an unbeliever, and for the confirmation of the testimony. Thus the ways of God are justified on different grounds.

To renounce this process, is attended with many evils and degradations. It casts a base reflection on the bounty of providence in affording us different methods of investigating and finding truth. Thus, in common life, the evidence of one sense may be added to that of another, and that of reasoning to both. And who, but an enthusiast, can question, that in divinity

and moral science, fair deductions from well established principles are to be received as verities? Nay, to deny the legitimacy of this process, is a reflection on the sacred oracles, as if they were not founded on eternal truth, or were not true until they were *declared* to be the will of God. Surely unalterable truths and revelation are not at variance. It may be well worthy of attention, whether false notions, or at least imperfect views of the just limits of scriptural evidence, have not enchaind the progress of moral science, whose principles are eternal realities. Besides, by disjoining the connection of truths revealed and unrevealed, the usefulness of religious instruction is injuriously limited; Christian consolation is needlessly abridged, by rejecting an additional ground of evidence; and, finally, the absurd conclusions of scepticism and infidelity are left to triumph, while the glories of the divine perfections and government are, by irrational, though long assumed maxims, criminally veiled.

## CHAP. II.

## DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATIONS OF TERMS.

## SECT. I.

*Of Equity, Liberty, a Moral Agent, Moral Evil, the Nature of Things, a Negative Cause, and Permission.*

HAVING occasion, in this Essay, to make a frequent use of the terms Equity and Sovereignty as expressive of the fundamental subjects discussed; and of a variety of other terms and subjects connected with these leading thoughts; it is requisite, before we proceed, to define and explain them. The design, however, is not an attempt to impose on others a new nomenclature, as expressive of theological and moral ideas, but to prevent ambiguity and misunderstanding. All I ask is, that my reasoning be judged according to *my own* explanations, which are adopted, not through the affectation of novelty, but the expediency of the case. When new ideas arise, on any subject, two inconveniences present themselves; either, first, the invention of new terms to express them; or, secondly, the adoption of old terms with a necessary variation of meaning. Of these two



inconveniences attendant upon every language, I prefer an explanation of terms in common use.

By EQUITY, as a divine attribute, I understand *a supreme disposition and right to give unto all their DUE*. That this is an attribute of Deity is too plain to need a formal proof. But, further to illustrate the meaning of the definition, it may be observed, that a thing is properly due from one being to another, when there is a true ground of claim, either in the nature of things, or on account of any other adequate consideration. Thus, in whatever particular a creature has a true ground of claim on God, that attribute of his nature which we denominate his Equity engages him to bestow it; but when no such ground exists, there can be no engagement. Whether, therefore, the object of divine Equity be God himself, or his creatures, this perfection of his nature engages him to grant, to the utmost extent, what is *truly* claimed. And it behoves us to reflect and remember, that in proportion as we are equitable, we shall give to God the things that are God's, and to creatures the things that are theirs.

When it is said that something is due to any object, it implies a person owing the thing

claimable. And as the subject under consideration is *divine* Equity, we may consider it in reference to God as owing, and to some of the most important objects as having a claim upon him. We observe, then, that God owes to *himself* every thing that does not imply a contradiction or imperfection; or, in other words, he can do nothing which is incompatible with his infinite excellencies or his real dignity. To a *creature*, as such, God owes nothing; for the very idea of derivation, and that of absolute dependence, which are essential to a creature, exclude all claim on the Creator for existence itself, and consequently for any of its enjoyments. But this cannot be said of a creature considered as accountable. For the idea of accountability founds a claim on him who requires. We therefore remark, that God owes to an *accountable creature* those things which are essential, in order to constitute him such; particularly, the faculties of *intellect* and *will*, *freedom* of choice, and *objects suitable* to his wants. And if this point be examined with strictness and impartiality, it will be found, that whatever an accountable creature enjoys more than these, is not claimable as due, but is a matter of undeserved favour.

When I say that Equity requires of the person owing, the giving of his due to every

one; the meaning is not that the operation of Equity can in no case be suspended, but that the creature has no ground of claim against that operation. Though the creature is secure from *suffering* any thing but what is in strictness his due; yet Equity does not bind God against conferring acts of *favour*, which may illustrate, by the manner of bestowing them, the honour of his extensive government. This must be granted by all who admit that there is mercy with God. And what is divine mercy but that modification of goodness which *over-rules* the claims of strict equity towards a creature deserving misery, in a manner consistent with God's real honour. That divine Equity is *bound* only on *one side* of the line of rectitude, if I may so express myself, appears also from this consideration; that otherwise, though a moral system from its very nature is defectible, God could have no right to over-rule an actual defect for securing the final happiness of any one offender, which is absurd.

Yet, it must be observed, as the delinquency of a defectible creature would be naturally followed with penal evil; and as Equity requires that the penal sanction (which either explicitly or tacitly belongs to every law) should follow the transgression of a law enacted; we must conclude, that the office of sovereign benevo-

lence, or mercy, does not consist in the annihilation or the disannulling of that sanction, but in finding and appointing an expedient, whereby the equitable claims are granted, while the offender is not irremediably bound over to deserved punishment. This exhibits the glory of Redemption,—‘Christ hath redeemed us from ‘the curse of the law, being made a curse for ‘us.’ ‘For all have sinned, and come short of ‘the glory of God.’ ‘By the deeds of the law ‘there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.’ ‘But now the righteousness of God without the ‘law is manifested.’ ‘That he might be just, ‘and the justifier of him which believeth in ‘Jesus.’—‘Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift.’

It has been before observed, that accountability supposes *freedom*; or that an accountable creature has a right, in truth and equity, to claim it of him who requires an account, as a condition indispensably requisite. This is otherwise called the *Liberty* of a rational being to choose his own end and the means of obtaining it; or, to prefer an object of happiness and the method of securing its possession. By this LIBERTY, or *Freedom*, I understand *an exemption from constraint and restraint*. Its general nature is not a positive faculty either of the will or of the soul; but ‘exemption,’ which is a *negative*.

idea. And the special difference of this kind of exemption is, that the rational being is not 'constrained' to make a wrong or culpable choice or preference, on the one side; nor is 'restrained' from making a right or virtuous choice or preference, on the other. In a word, this Freedom denotes what God *does not*, rather than what he *does*, in reference to an accountable creature. It expresses that the subject is free from constraint to evil, and that he is not restrained from good, when he chooses, out of various objects, what appears to him eligible. It implies, that in all instances of responsibility he is absolutely free to choose or to act according to his pleasure, preference, or inclination.

It may be added, for illustration, that this liberty implies a diversity of objects, without which there can be no preference. That this is essential to the idea of accountability, is plain from this consideration, that where there is but one object of choice, there is no possibility of erring, which is evidently incompatible with the notion of being accountable. To be free from *defectibility*, or a *liableness* to choose amiss, is an incommunicable perfection of Deity. We may further observe, that no one can be morally free in his elections, but he who chooses what *appears* to him eligible; for there is no medium between the exercise of this rational freedom, and con-



straint by such a fixed natural necessity as is totally incompatible with accountability. Impulsive *spontaneity* belongs to brutes; but *freedom*, its reverse, belongs exclusively to moral agents.

As there are different kinds of moral agents, and as the same agent may be viewed in different circumstances, a definition suited to each variety must be somewhat dissimilar. By a MORAL AGENT in the most general sense, and without any exception of persons or circumstances, I mean, *a being capable of enjoying the chief good*. This definition is applicable to all intelligent beings, whether in heaven, earth, or hell. ‘The chief ‘good,’ as here *objectively* taken, is JEHOVAH all-sufficient. When taken *subjectively*, it denotes the highest degree of happiness; in which acceptation it includes the full enjoyment of the object. Between brutes and mankind, in various respects, there are indefinite degrees of approximation; but in this particular there is the most essential difference; since every one of the human race, but no brute however exalted, is ‘capable of enjoying the chief good.’ The capability here intended expresses a natural or constitutional aptitude, not a moral fitness.

A PERFECT Moral Agent is *a being actually enjoying the chief good, and who enjoys every*

*inferior good in a regular subordination.* This definition applies to God, holy angels, and glorified saints; and to Adam and Eve while in a state of rectitude. But righteous men in the present state,—though they ‘actually enjoy the ‘chief good,’ so far as to know, love, and participate a kind of holy intercourse with God,—are not ‘perfect;’ because their enjoyment of ‘every inferior good’ is not always, if ever, in a ‘regular subordination’ to the chief.

AN ACCOUNTABLE Moral Agent is *a being who possesses a natural capacity for enjoying the chief good, who has moral means both suitable and sufficient to prevent him from sinning, with the liberty of abusing or not abusing those means.* This definition is applicable to all accountable moral agents whatever,—the apostate angels and human souls in the lowest state of misery, not excepted. That these have a natural *capacity* of enjoying the chief good, and the *liberty* of making a right or a wrong use of means, needs neither proof nor explanation. But some, from a preconceived notion of ‘moral means,’ may find it difficult to admit that apostate spirits have ‘suitable and sufficient moral means to ‘prevent them from sinning.’ Means, in reference to moral agency, denote objective considerations, or inducements, which in their own nature are adapted to promote virtue, and which

would do so in a virtuous mind. The devils *believe* that there is one God, and were it not for their culpable enmity, or an evil disposition, this would prevent their sinning against him. Their wickedness, however, does not alter the nature, the suitableness, or the sufficiency of such moral means, objectively considered. If infernal spirits are *offenders* as well as sufferers, they must possess *moral* means sufficient and suitable, in themselves considered, to prevent their sinning against God, and *freedom* for that purpose; the former, because the abuse of such means constitutes the very essence of their crimes; the latter, because their liberty of not sinning is essential to their accountability. It is scarcely needful to remark, that this view of the subject is applicable *a fortiori* to depraved men in our world. If apostate spirits in a state of the greatest wickedness and infernal despair, are inexcusable, because they have a natural capacity and sufficient objective inducements for acting otherwise; how much more inexcusable are men upon earth, even in their lowest state of degradation and depravity!

A *perfect* accountable Moral Agent in a state of ORIGINAL PROBATION, is *a being who has an actual enjoyment of the chief good; suitable and sufficient means for avoiding transgression and acting rightly; liberty to sin and not to sin;*

and a defectibility of nature. The first parts of this definition have been before noticed, and need no further explanation. When it is said that he has ‘a defectibility of nature,’ it is intended to express this primary and eternal truth,—that a created nature, however perfect, is *defectible*. Indefectibility, every reflecting unprejudiced mind must admit, is an incommunicable attribute of Deity, no less than infinity, independence, all-sufficiency, and immutability. Defectibility, therefore, is an essential property of every nature but the divine. To deny this, is to identify creator and creature, and to contradict the plainest facts—the facts of actual defection and crimes.

Here it may be further observed, since neither defect nor defectibility can, in any respect, be in God, or belong to him as an infinitely perfect Being, the idea of his imparting them is necessarily excluded; for how can he possibly impart what he neither has, nor can have? Therefore, the ground, the cause, or the reason of defectibility is nothing positive, else it would be from God, but a *negative* principle, *essentially related* to limited existence. Whatever perfection or excellence, whatever faculty or estimable quality, whatever good principle or property any creature has or can have, it is the gift of God; but the *cause of defectibility* is

not of that character. Were it a positive principle, it would be something perfect of its kind; but is the cause of defectibility a perfection? How then can its opposite be an infinite perfection and excellency? Can an infinitely perfect nature be at once the ground both of indefectibility and defectibility? The two ideas are absolutely incompatible. The latter, therefore, is of the creature exclusively. To God belongs *absolute perfection*, to a creature, however excellent and exalted, *comparative imperfection*. And what can this be but the *want* of that perfection which is unlimited? In a word, it cannot be any thing but a *negative* property *essentially related* to limited existence, or to every nature that is not absolutely infinite.

We may again remark, if such a moral agent as is now under consideration has not *in himself* a ground, or negative cause of deviating from rectitude, when poised in the balance of strict Equity, or when he has all that is strictly due to him, he would not be defectible; that is, would not be a creature. Besides, the very notion of accountableness implies a possibility of receding from the rule of rectitude; but a being that is not defectible, has not a possibility of defection. And as God has no defect, nor any ground of defectibility, how can he impart it, or be in any respect its author or its cause?



Yet, by giving existence to a creature, he affords an *occasion* for a comparative defect, limitation, dependence, and all other negative properties to arise. Thus the existence of a mathematical circle, which is a positive thing, gives occasion to an inseparable *negative* property in that figure; for its mathematical centre is a *relative nothing*, or what has neither length, breadth, thickness, nor any conceivable dimensions; in a word, it is *nothing related* to something, but without which, nevertheless, a proper idea of a circle would be impossible, and its properties incapable of demonstration.

In the definition it is said, that such a moral agent 'has liberty to sin and not to sin.' By liberty is meant, as before shewn, exemption from constraint and restraint, and here it is applied to the act of sin. That such an agent has a liberty of not sinning must be allowed, else it would follow that a moral creature would be under a physical necessity of sinning; which would destroy his accountability, and involve a notion at once unworthy of God, and in its own nature impossible; for, as will be further explained in the sequel, sin has no *efficient* ultimate cause, but a *deficient* one only. Were the proper nature of sin, or the sinfulness of an act, adequately considered, we should never hear of the absurdity, the blasphemous impiety,

of God being the *author of sin*, by a reprobating decree. It may, however, be observed, in brief, that if any being has, in equity, no *deficient source* of deviation from rectitude, he is not in the rank of moral accountable agents, or of created existence! Such is the awful prerogative of JEHOVAH, as the moral Governor; and such is the absolute dependence of a creature!

By MORAL EVIL, considered as a *sinful act*, I understand, *a deviation from, or want of conformity to divine rectitude*. What I call ‘divine rectitude’ is the standard to which every moral agent ought to be conformed, according to the constituted relation of things. The nature of God is immutable, but the capacities of his creatures, and the existence of surrounding objects, are the effects of his will. And these capacities are such, that he has an equitable claim, that they who possess them should be always conformable to rectitude. A continuation in a state of perfect moral rectitude depends on universal conformity to this constituted relation of things. Thus, for instance, man in his primeval state stood related to all the objects in the universe around him. Every capacity of mind, and every organ of sense, had various objects suited to gratify and render happy its own nature. But any deliberate wrong choice

or use of these innumerable good things,—as to relative subordination of preference, degree of attachment, or the like,—constituted a deviation from rectitude, a forfeiture of original perfection, and, in a word, a degree of moral evil.

Moral evil in its *abstract* nature, or the SINFULNESS of a moral act, is a *want of conformity to divine rectitude*; or, a *defect in relation to the will of God*; or, a *failure in reference to divine law*. These definitions amount, in effect, to the same thing. For there is no divine law but what is conformable to the will of God; and his will is ever conformable to the rectitude of his nature. The root, the basis, the operative cause of every will, is the nature of the person willing; and the immediate operative cause of every law, is the will of the legislator. What deserves more particular notice is the *general nature* of the thing defined; and that is, a *want*, a *defect*, or a *failure*, each denoting a *negative* idea. If the general nature of moral evil were something *positive*, it would be ultimately from God, the only possible source of every thing positive in the universe, whether being, principle, or act; which would lead to this absurdity, that evil, the worst of all evils, is a good thing. In every *sinful act* there are two things; first, the faculty of *will*, including a divine *energy*, impelling it to seek its appropriate object, good, and to choose what

appears to the intellect preferable, at the time of choosing. This is an excellency, a privilege, due to the moral agent, without which he could not be morally obliged. Secondly, there is a *defect*, a *want*, a *negative* principle; so that the agent either does not aim, in his election, at that end which conformity to rectitude requires, or else adopts a wrong, or an irregular mean of attaining it. A perfectly good act, implies a conformity in both these respects; but an act which is defective in either of them is morally evil. The path of rectitude is one, but the paths of error, or of moral delinquency, are many; as numerous as are false ends and wrong means.

If this definition require any further explanation, we may observe, that if the agent had not in *himself* the *ground* of a failure, moral evil could not possibly take place. But as every thing positive and efficient is from God, the cause of sin, or its ultimate origin, is not efficient but deficient. On the contrary, the prevention or counteraction of moral evil requires, in the nature of things, an efficient cause. Another consequence necessarily follows, that moral evil, or the sinfulness of a moral act, cannot be an object of any divine decree; for it is absurd to suppose that God has decreed any thing which he would not, or could not consistently with his nature, effect; and yet, as a

shadow is known by the substance to which it refers, so may moral evil be known to infinite intelligence, in every possible case, by the good to which it is opposed; and the fore-knowledge of this ground of defectibility in all possible circumstances may give occasion to positive acts, divine decrees, and operations.

By THE NATURE OF THINGS I mean, *what essentially belongs to God or to a creature.* There is not any thing conceivable but what has a nature or essence; nor is there any thing conceivable to which a nature belongs beside either God or a creature. Every idea, therefore, that can possibly occur, must be included in this definition, as it cannot but refer either to the infinite God or to a finite creature. Some, indeed, consider ‘the nature of things,’ as a phrase denoting *established laws*; but with such a very confined sense of it I have at present no concern. Where this last idea occurs, I express it, for the sake of distinction, by either ‘the established laws of nature,’ or ‘the physical nature of things.’

By a NEGATIVE CAUSE I understand, *a ground of certainty consisting in defect or limitation.* The terms *cause* and *power* denote commonly and properly, a *positive* idea. The formation of language is progressive. As objects, qualities, actions, or circumstances present themselves to



the senses, or to the mind, mankind labour to designate ideas by articulate sounds, and afterwards by ocular signs. The sounds or signs are at first all arbitrary; by degrees they are habitually associated with ideas which are thought to be similar, in some respects, to others to which they were previously applied. But as new objects, qualities, properties, associations, and uses, are developed, new words are invented, or the same words are made to stand for different ideas; and the shades of difference are to be ascertained either from the nature of the subject, or from the relation they bear to other words. Though such terms as 'cause' and 'power,' imply a degree of abstraction of thought, and progressive improvement in language; yet, the original positive import would easily attach itself to each advancing step of generalization. Hence, in any language, there are comparatively but few terms calculated to express, unequivocally, *negative* ideas. However, closer investigations assure us that there are negative properties and relations which are a ground of certainty; though the strength of preceding associations, on the one hand, and the poverty of language, on the other, render it extremely difficult to enunciate those ideas. This, I apprehend, accounts for the sentiment *assumed* by many celebrated divines and philosophers, that there is no ground of *certainty* but from a positive

cause, a divine decree. Hence, the fruitless enquiries after the origin of moral evil, and the absurdity of imputing to the infinitely benevolent and just God, an irrespective decree of reprobation, and a decree to permit moral evil. Still the use of the terms ‘cause’ or ‘power,’ or of some term customarily applied to denote a certainty of effect or event, is unavoidable, (except new words are invented) accompanied with some qualifying epithet, as negative, passive, deficient, or the like.

The preceding remarks are strongly applicable to the term *permission*. The term is positive, but the idea intended is, unquestionably, negative. To PERMIT, in a theological and moral acceptation, is *to suffer*, or, *not to hinder*. The associations and prejudices above mentioned have operated so powerfully on the minds of some, who revolted at the thought of ascribing to God a predestinating causality of moral evil, that they had recourse to a ‘*decree to permit*,’ preferring a contradiction in terms to impiety of sentiment. But, in reality, this is nothing better than taking shelter among the leaves of verbal ambiguity. No difficulty is removed by it, but the *idea* of divine positive causation is retained, except that of *chance* be substituted as the ground of *certainty*! If there be not in a moral agent a negative ground of certainty,

it is clearly impossible for permission to render any thing certain. Besides, if a decree to permit convey any idea, it must be this, a decree not to hinder; and wherein does this differ from a decree not to decree? A decree not to create what has no ground of existence in itself, is evidently absurd; for a mere possibility of existence is no ground of certainty of the event, if but permitted. And yet, no less absurd is the notion of permitting the occurrence of moral evil, if there were not in the agent a negative cause, or ground of certainty, if not hindered. And if there be such a ground in case of permission or not hindering, the notion of a decree for the purpose has no use or meaning.

In fact, the idea of *permission*, clearly conceived, is of the utmost importance in theology and ethics; and it is an idea which this term is calculated very properly to express. The precise cause of embarrassment is the want of accurate acquaintance with the doctrine of a negative ground of certainty, in a word, the true origin of moral evil. The plain declarations of God's holy word, as far as necessary to salvation, are adapted to the level of the meanest capacity; where the heart is well disposed; but principles calculated to reconcile seeming discrepancies, to untie the knots of controversy, and to detect the sophistries of error, are of another kind. In these

investigations it is of the utmost consequence to define both terms and things, except we wish to argue at uncertainty, or dispute in the dark. Geometricians have always been commended for paying so much attention to definitions; and the same conduct has been strenuously recommended, with most evident propriety, by LOCKE, and others, in reference to moral subjects. There is one circumstance however which has been, I apprehend, altogether overlooked:—if EUCLID had not given a definition of *negative ideas*, though couched under *positive terms*, his reasoning would have been inconclusive. He begins where theologians and moral philosophers are likely to *end*. A point, a line, and a superficies, all including *negations*, or nothing *related* to something, form the basis of all his demonstrations! And I will venture to affirm, that until a clear view of *negative causality* is entertained, moral science will always remain essentially incomplete; and polemical theology continue in ignoble shackles.

## SECT. II.

*Of Sovereignty, Necessity, Contingency, Modern Calvinism, and Modern Arminianism.*

BY SOVEREIGNTY, as a divine prerogative and perfection, and as distinguished from Equity, I understand, *a supreme right to will and to do whatever is not inconsistent with universal Equity.* The idea intended may be variously expressed, but I know of no words better adapted to designate it in a brief manner. It may, however, be advantageous to represent the same thing in different lights, in order to avoid contention about words. The term Sovereignty is sometimes used, in a loose sense, as synonymous with *supremacy*; but in the above definition a very different meaning is designed, which the reader is particularly requested to observe. Every attribute of Deity is supreme; but, properly speaking, every attribute of Deity is not sovereign. Supreme Equity is the *highest* Equity, and the same may be said of any other perfection, for each in God must be the highest. But *sovereign* Equity, in the sense intended to be conveyed by the definition, would be a contradiction in terms; as much so, as *arbitrary* Equity. It is, in short, the idea of *arbitrariness* under the



restriction of its not being inconsistent with universal Equity and wisdom. As *arbitrary*, however, is often used for *capricious*, and among men in power for the exercise of unlawful authority; the term 'sovereignty' is more reverential and appropriate than 'arbitrariness,' though with the before mentioned limitation it expresses the same idea.

'Sovereignty' does not extend to the prevention or counteraction of any divine purpose or decree; for this would imply that the purpose was changeable, was not formed in wisdom, and needed to be corrected. Antecedently to the consideration of a decree, many things,—substances, modifications, and arrangements,—very different from what take place in the universe, may be supposed to be within the prerogative of divine sovereignty. Every thing, doubtless, was decreed in infinite wisdom, and this excludes the idea of caprice in sovereign appointments. Prior to the consideration of a divine purpose, the contemplated salvation of men rather than fallen angels, or of those among men who will be actually saved, was merely possible; the certainty of the event depended, exclusively, on sovereign pleasure, directed by wisdom. But on the supposition of a divine decree to do more for one creature than for another, the prerogative of sovereignty cannot be supposed, in any

instance, to disannul that determination, without impeaching God's infinite wisdom, or absurdly supposing that sovereignty may militate against itself. In a word, its language is 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.' The purpose is wise, as well as gracious, and therefore unalterable.

In regard to a *moral* system, as such, and every individual moral agent, whatever is not the effect of Equity, *must of course* be the effect of Sovereignty, in the sense defined. For to these two principles *every thing*, as to the divine conduct towards such a system, is ultimately reducible. Abstract from it equitable desert, and sovereign favour, and nothing remains. This position, as it relates to the conduct of God, to Christian knowledge, and to pious affections, is of the greatest importance. But as I never heard or saw it denied, a formal proof of it appears to be needless. My full conviction is, that the negation of it, in any given instance, may be reduced to some absurd consequence.

The punishment even of the guilty (much less of the innocent) is not an object of divine sovereignty. To punish the guilty is the office of Equity, which gives to all their due. For mercy to punish, or justice to confer undeserved favour, is discordant in thought and language; but not

more so, than sovereign punishment,—without assuming another meaning of the term, or disputing about words. In brief, as *Equity* never disapproves of any creature, especially a moral agent, where there is nothing *wrong*, or no *desert*; so, divine *Sovereignty* is in no case employed but for the *welfare* of its object. In proportion as any creature has no equitable claim upon God, all he is and possesses that may be denominated *good* must be the effect of Sovereignty. This requires further illustration.

When we conceive of JEHOVAH adopting *one scheme* of things out of all possibles (which the divine intellect beheld in the all-sufficient essence), it is evident that he must have exerted an act of high Sovereignty. He could be under no obligation, except to himself, the infinitely good and wise, to cause one possible plan to become the object of his purpose, rather than another. ‘Who hath known the mind of the ‘Lord,’ in this discrimination, ‘that he should have ‘a counsellor?’ It is not possible for a finite mind to comprehend all the grounds and ultimate reasons of the divine pleasure and preference. He alone who knows all possible entities, all possible worlds, with all their differences, relations, and final results, and all this at the same instant, can penetrate the depth of sovereign choice; in regard either of the general plan

itself, or of its contents, as to co-existence, relative subordination, and succession. And in executing this high and sovereign act of preference and purpose, God could be under no conceivable obligation, except to himself, to fulfil his own wise decree. For the exercise of his wisdom, goodness, power, equity, and sovereignty, all things were originally formed, and now exist. 'Thou hast created all things, and 'for thy pleasure they are and were created.'

The same divine prerogative pervades the conduct of *providence*. God is under no original obligation to any but himself to preserve or perpetuate the existence of any creature. I said 'original' obligation; because, if his infinite goodness and unerring wisdom decreed, and his condescension promised a prolonged or perpetual support, there is a sense in which intelligent creatures may be said to have a ground of claim for that support; and yet, even in these cases, the obligation, properly speaking, is to *himself*, his wisdom in declaring, and veracity in performing. He is infinite Truth, and therefore it is his glory that 'he cannot lie', that 'he cannot deny himself.' Hence 'the heirs of promise' are furnished with a basis of 'strong consolation.'

We behold, moreover, the reign of sove-

reignty in the wonderful *difference* that subsists among creatures. Why, for instance, is one creature formed greater, stronger, handsomer, more intelligent or wise than another? Why are some made to suffer less than others for offences equal, or even greater, though none suffer beyond their due? Some of the most daring offenders are spared long, while others, who are not only free from gross crimes, but in a state of divine acceptance, are visited (still within the limits of their deserts, in themselves considered,) with great calamities, or premature death? One nation is left covered with thick darkness, while others are enlightened with revealed truth. Why was Abraham favoured in so transcendent a manner above all other men of his day? Why were Moses and Aaron appointed to the high honours of legislation and the priesthood? Why was David raised to a kingdom, and Solomon endowed with superior wisdom? Why was Mary, rather than any other woman, chosen to be the mother of the Messiah? Why was Paul made so distinguished a herald to proclaim ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ?’ These are but a few specimens of a sovereign providence, selected from a store equally wondrous and inexhaustible.

All the constituted *laws of nature* must be referred to this sublime prerogative of the



Creator for their source. *Miracles* denote a temporary suspension or inversion of these constituted laws. And, as some of these were punitive and others merciful, in their design, the former, strictly speaking, were the effects of Equity, and the latter of Sovereignty. At the same time, those that were punitive in their design, as directed against the wicked, were mercifully over-ruled for the good of the righteous, as in the instances of Noah, Lot, Moses and Aaron; and such as were merciful in their design, as those performed by Jesus Christ, were the innocent occasion of evil to the wicked. We may add, that every principle, act, and degree of holiness in a creature, and especially in fallen man, must necessarily claim the same origin, — sovereign grace. The connexion of moral and natural evil is as indissoluble, according to the original constitution and course of things, as any cause and its appropriate effect in the physical world; and the suspension of the effect in the former case, requires as real a miracle, as any supernatural suspension does in the latter. This doctrine the principles of moral science abundantly substantiate; and the scriptures, where they speak of grace as a new creation, a new birth, a resurrection, and the like, afford it a striking illustration.

At the *final judgment*, which is the closing

scene of probation, there will be, according to the scriptural account, a wonderful display of Sovereignty, as well as Equity. Who among the saints will say, or can say, that the reward does not far exceed the strict desert of their service and obedience? While none shall have reason to complain that they are treated unjustly, some—washed from the foulest stains, justified, sanctified, and saved, for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and by the operation of the divine Spirit—will be invited in strains of sovereign pleasure, and admitted to ‘inherit the kingdom ‘prepared for them from the foundation of the ‘world.’ And, finally, to this prerogative we must refer the *promised resurrection* of the body. This miracle will be to the righteous a distinguished favour, but to the wicked an occasion of equitable punishment. The doctrine appeared to the heathen philosophers, some of whom disputed with Paul at Athens, an incredible fancy; nor should we be surprised at it, while they remained ignorant of the miraculous power of God. For, short of a supernatural act, what can be supposed to effect so astonishing a change? And how could a future miracle be known, with any degree of certainty, but by a divine revelation?

The term NECESSITY, and the ideas intended to be designated by it, have been productive of

many voluminous disputes; but with the sentiments of others I do not at present interfere. By NECESSITY, in its most comprehensive notion, I understand *that by which any thing either is, or COMES TO PASS.* The attentive reader will observe, that the idea of necessity, according to the first part of this definition, is more universal than that of *cause*; for we may say, with propriety, that God *is*, has a nature and perfections, by, from, or of necessity. The word Cause has no meaning but as it stands related to some *effect*; but God, whether in his nature, being, or properties, is not an effect in any sense. It is his glory, his adorable pre-eminence, that he is uncaused. Besides, the notion of a *first* cause, which belongs to him exclusively, evidently precludes that of a prior cause. The idea of the divine necessity is included in that of *possibility*. What is not possible cannot be necessary; but if an *eternal* existence be possible, it is also necessary, for it never can *begin* to exist.

The definition also includes ‘that by which ‘any thing *comes to pass.*’ And here the idea of necessity coincides with that of causality; for nothing ‘comes to pass’ without an adequate cause. Nothing takes its rise, or begins to be, without a causal origin. It is an ancient, approved, and an incontrovertible axiom, that

‘there is no effect without a cause.’ We are therefore sure, that whatever ‘comes to pass’ has a *causal* Necessity. It has, however, been shewn, that there is, in the nature of things, a *negative* as well as a positive causality. We may therefore conclude, that all Necessity is reducible to these two ideas: that by which a thing *is*; and, that by which a thing is *caused* to be. The former relates only to God, the latter only to a creature.

The same subject may be viewed in another light, still included in the definition. All Necessity is either by nature or by will. Thus it is the *nature* of God to exist of necessity, and to be infinitely perfect; and it is the *nature* of a creature to be dependent, limited, defectible, and comparatively imperfect, of necessity. No will can alter these properties; therefore they ‘come to pass’ by necessity of nature. Indeed the existence and positive properties of every creature are effects of divine will; for which there can be no other assignable cause. It was at the option of the Creator to give them; but not so, that any creature should exist, or even be contemplated as possible, without *negative* properties, as a contrast to, or a denial of his own. He alone is possessed of infinity, independence, all-sufficiency, and immutability; no other can possibly possess them; the supposition

of the contrary involves the denial of the divine unity and infinitude; consequently, by a necessity of nature, to the exclusion of will, every creature in the universe must exist without them.

There is also a necessity of what ‘comes to pass’ by *will*. For instance, the universe of created beings—from the highest intelligence to the lowest reptile, from that glorious orb, the sun, to the smallest atom—could have no other necessity of existence but the will of the Creator, ‘For his pleasure they are and were created;’ to shew forth the glory of his nature and perfections; or, in one word, his Godhead. But let us confine the illustration of necessity by will, to man. The human BODY is subject to the common laws, or the appointed modes of operation, of material elements; such as gravitation, cohesion, and fermentation; whence ensue putrefaction, and the dissolution of its form. By the same divine will and appointment, it is necessitated, while the organs are perfect, by vibratory motions from objects of sense; thus we are necessarily affected by what we see, hear, smell, taste, and feel. It is moreover subject to many other involuntary motions. Again, the divine will has also subjected the human MIND, in some respects, to necessity. It has that kind, that degree, and that perpetuity of existence which the will of God has determined. Man, indeed,



as a free agent, is suffered to vary the mode of his continuance, as to body and mind; but he cannot deprive himself of *being*. This depends on the will of the Creator, who has imposed upon it a necessity of duration, according to his own sovereign pleasure; and what that duration is, he has clearly revealed.

It is of importance to add, that the human mind is also necessitated, by the supreme will, according to a general law of its constitution, to seek truth and happiness. It is not compatible with its structure, that it should seek either falsehood or misery, for its own sake. The understanding, though often wretchedly bewildered, still seeks truth; and the will, though still oftener miserably deceived, seeks good, and chooses what appears to be so, as its happiness. No condition, no art, no evasion, no conceivable moral freedom, can divest the will of a necessity of acting according to its nature, or the constitution of the willing faculty by divine appointment, which is ever wise and benevolent. When an object is presented, the will necessarily either chooses or rejects it; suspends the choice or does not suspend it; loves or does not love it; desires or does not desire it. It is free to choose one thing rather than another, but not to choose contrary things, as to speak and to be silent, to walk and to be at rest, at the same time. And

it is necessitated to make its elections out of the repository of its own knowledge, or from the objects or considerations with which the person is acquainted. 'What can we reason,' or what can we choose, 'but from what we know,' or think we know? In these respects, a necessity is laid upon us by the wise and benevolent will of our Creator, for which we should be grateful; for were it otherwise, we could not be rational and intelligent beings.

As there is no effect without a causal necessity; as moral evil is an effect, or, according to the definition, what 'comes to pass;' and as all Necessity is reducible to either that of nature or that of divine will; it is an interesting question, To which of these must we ascribe moral evil, or the *sinfulness* of a moral act? Most assuredly, not to the will of God, who opposes, hates, and condemns it. He wills the existence, the positive properties, the constituted faculties, in short, every thing excellent in all creatures; for without his purpose and energy they could have no being. These do not oppose, but harmonize with his holy nature; but moral evil is an opposition to his holiness and infinite rectitude. It must, therefore, proceed ultimately, in connexion with free will, from the other causal necessity, that of essential defect and limitation; or from that negative principle,

that root of mutability, which is inseparably attached to every created nature. But, as all creatures are under the controul of the divine will, we are not to confound mutability with an actual change, or defectibility with defection, as if it were not within the province of supreme will to prevent the consequence that might ensue from this negative property. Thus it does not follow, that because angels and glorified men are in their own nature mutable, that they will really change for the worse; or because they are defectible, that actual defection will take place. The very notion of a negative property, or principle of mutability, implies, that the being to which it is related may be so aided, strengthened, or purified, as to prevent its actual expansion; when it pleases the all-sufficient and infinitely wise God to communicate what is adequate to the occasion. And this he does in countless millions of instances. What would become of the best of men upon earth, what would become of the purest and most exalted spirits in heaven, if *left to themselves*? This language is applicable to all: ‘Hold thou us up, and we shall ‘be safe.’

Having so fully explained the ideas conveyed by the term *necessity*, it is of little moment to enquire whether any of them may be expressed by another word. Some have preferred the term *certainly*; but I can perceive no reason

for the preference but in one of these two considerations; first, some advantage which the term affords in the argument *ad hominem*, with those who admit of the certainty of events as predicted and foreseen, and which cannot therefore be absolutely contingent or fortuitous. Secondly, it is a substitute for a term which must appear objectionable to those (and to those only) who are unacquainted with negative causality. Such persons have no idea of causal necessity, but as either blind fate, or arbitrary appointment. Certainty they cannot deny, without renouncing prediction, and the divine prescience; but it should be considered, that all certainty must have a cause, and until this be ascertained, the difficulty is not accounted for, nor in any measure obviated. In their account, nothing is foreseen but because it is fore-appointed; and thus their notion of necessity is confined to that of will. When the leaves of verbosity are removed, and the idea is disclosed, it imputes moral evil to God's appointment, though its advocates disapprove of the consequence of their own statement. The preceding representation of necessity fairly removes this consequence; while, at the same time, it disclaims and precludes the idea of absolute contingency.

The term CONTINGENCY designates a relative

idea; the same thing may be contingent, understanding thereby its not being fore-known in its proper cause, to one being, which is not so to another. It would be infinitely degrading to the all-wise God to suppose that *any thing* is contingent to him. While we fore-know nothing as infallibly certain, respecting creatures in their own nature mutable, defectible, and free, except by divine information; God's prescience is so absolute, and so universal, as to comprehend every thing: 'his understanding is infinite.' Hence, as two effects are not precisely the same, we may be certain there was a reason, or some cause of the difference, though we may be unable to perceive the mode of its operation. If there were any effect contingent to God, it would be an effect without a cause; and then we might consistently affirm, that the universe exists without a cause; a sentiment absurd as it is impious.

With a view to countenance the absolute contingency of moral actions, it has been stated that though omniscience is an attribute of deity, he may *choose* not to fore-know at least some events. Though omnipotence, say the abettors of this opinion, is a divine attribute, God does not choose to do all that he could do; and thus, it may be, though omniscience is a divine attribute, God does not choose to know, by way



of prescience, in what manner a free agent will determine his acts, as good or evil. This is extremely fallacious, for want of distinguishing what is the appropriate character and object of each attribute. The object of omnipotence is an effect, and it is the glory of God that he *cannot* produce all effects; he 'cannot lie,' he 'cannot deny himself,' he cannot give existence to an eternal, independent, all-sufficient, and immutable being. Though it is within the province of omnipotence to produce greater effects than any we can comprehend, we are certain it does not extend to what is absolutely infinite. As all effects are necessarily finite, so must be the operations of omnipotence. As the existence of God himself, and his perfections, are not objects on which omnipotence can exert itself; so neither can any object equal to himself be produced by it. An infinite effect is a contradiction.

But what are the appropriate objects of omniscience? Are these necessarily limited, like those of power? That supreme power can produce what is infinite, is, as before remarked, an absolute impossibility. But why? because it is not an object of power, any more than God himself is an effect. Whereas God's omniscience relates to himself, his infinite existence and attributes, no less than to creatures. It is the perfection

of his nature, that he knows all things and effects; and any limitation of knowledge would imply an imperfection. Is it an object of *choice* whether God be possessed or divested of an infinite perfection? Were it practicable, would it be to his honour that it should be limited? How is it possible for omnipotence to convert an infinite object to circumstances of limitation? In fine, it is the proper character of omnipotence, that it relates only to effects; but omniscience is related also to infinity, embracing all objects. And as the proper character of omniscience is that it comprehends, as its object, absolute infinity; without which it would be imperfect; therefore, *a fortiori*, it must comprehend every thing finite. It extends to all that is *possible*, as implied in infinite wisdom, much more to all that is actual. If it be the proper character of omniscience to comprehend what omnipotence could not possibly produce, as God himself and his infinite perfections; much more does it comprehend all the effects of the supreme power, and every thing, both positive and negative, to which they stand related. Besides, absolute contingency would not be favoured by this invention, if admitted; for if the suspension of prescience were voluntary, God might have fore-known future contingencies if he would, and therefore there must be some ground of that possible pre-

science. Consequently, the supposition is not only infinitely unworthy of the divine perfection, but also totally useless for the intended purpose.

In this work the terms CALVINISM and ARMINIANISM sometimes occur. They are employed, however, only as convenient terms of distinction. We acknowledge no authority in matters of faith but the testimony of God in his word; nor any umpire in matters of reasoning, but the evidence of principles and the force of argument. At the reformation from Popery, JOHN CALVIN drew up institutes of religious sentiments, the general character of which nearly resembles that of the sentiments of AUGUSTINE, in a very methodical, perspicuous, and elegant form. They contain, indeed, some particulars respecting the divine purpose, and a few subordinate points, which, I apprehend, are not consistent with the true meaning of scripture, and which are incapable of support on sound principles. On the doctrines of grace he is admirably clear, scriptural, and argumentatively strong. Here he had *positive* ground. But when he touches on reprobation, free will, the event of sin, and, in short, those points which depend on a proper knowledge of *negative* causality, his positions are bold and rash, and the consequences alarming. When these posi-

tions and consequences came, after his decease, to be discussed with freedom, JAMES ARMIN rendered himself conspicuous, and he with many others recoiled to the opposite extreme. These advanced principles and deduced conclusions calculated to give countenance to the exploded dogmas of PELAGIUS, and to veil the glory of sovereign grace.

In these remarks, I have no reference to private character, or to ministerial labour, on either side: it may be observed, however, that, in controversy, the one party employed its whole strength to defend the grace of God; and the other to vindicate man's free will, as essential to moral government. It is, nevertheless, remarkable, that ARMINIUS, and the Remonstrants, in opposing Calvinism, were as uninformed respecting the doctrine of *negative* causation as CALVIN himself, and therefore it is not surprising that the difficulties pressed by the parties respectively on each other, should remain unsolved. Without appropriate principles, by which the seeming inconsistencies of scripture on these points may be reconciled, there can be no sufficient evidence; and without such evidence there can be no fair solution of the difficulties in debate. On the whole, the doctrines, as exhibited by CALVIN, resemble a noble structure built upon a rock, with some of

the upper parts left insecure; and as exhibited by ARMINIUS, a fair building erected partly on a rock, and partly on sand. The former may need reparation, but the latter, however specious, must be rebuilt. Nevertheless, in a practical point of view, as the advocates of both systems maintain, on the subjects in debate, the paramount authority of the holy scriptures, and agree in many important topics of revealed truth, much good may be done on each side, where the power of these common truths prevails, and when the spirit of God applies them.

By MODERN CALVINISM I would be understood to mean, *that system of religion which represents the Sovereignty of divine Grace, without encroaching on the Equity of divine Government.* For instance, it represents God as decreeing all the good in the created universe, but, in a strict and absolute sense, no evil; as predestinating some to life and salvation, without being unjust to any; as foreseeing all things, without appointing sin; as bestowing grace, in perfect consistency with the freedom, the absolute freedom, of the human will in its moral actions. It maintains justification by faith, without depreciating good works; the certainty of the event of salvation, consistently with the use of means; in few words, the glories of the divine prerogative



in bestowing good, in a manner perfectly consistent with moral obligation, and the honours of divine justice in punishing none but those who deserve punishment, and according to the degree of their desert.

By MODERN ARMINIANISM I mean *that system of religion which represents the Equity of divine Government in such a manner as to encroach on the Sovereignty of divine Grace*: That is, in such a manner as to renounce the prerogative of communicating any favour, and particularly a gracious influence, to whom, when, how, and in what degree the sovereign and all-wise God pleases. For example, it rejects a predestination to life, to grace and glory, as if it were unworthy of God; it founds the divine prescience of good in man, on his self-determining power, as if the gift of preventing grace were no part of the divine prerogative, nor consistent with human liberty. In brief, by Modern Arminianism I understand those doctrines which are maintained in the writings of Dr. WHITBY and Mr. FLETCHER. In the former of these authors we find the Arminian sentiments reduced to a regular system, defended by extensive learning and acuteness, arrayed in scholastic formalities, and closed with an appeal to the Christian Fathers; in the latter, we have the same opinions in a more popular form, ornamented with the

flowers of rhetoric, with a singular intermixture of piety and passion. As, however, the writer was not an 'evil man and a seducer,' he did not 'grow worse and worse,' but, as he advanced in his polemical career, his doctrine became more conciliatory, and his temper more candid.

## CHAP. III.

OF MORAL GOVERNMENT, AS IT RELATES TO THE SUPREME GOVERNOR; MAN THE SUBJECT OF IT; AND THE RULE BY WHICH HE IS GOVERNED.

## SECT. I.

*Of Moral Government, as it relates to the Supreme Governor.*

IT was an interesting question, implying a strong affirmative, which Abraham ‘the friend of God’ expressed, when contemplating the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, ‘Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’\* Most, if not all the errors which have existed in the church of God, originated in false notions respecting the divine character. He, however, enacts no laws which are absolutely impracticable, and passes no judgment but according to truth. And while he does nothing but what is right, he possesses a sovereign prerogative of conferring favours according to his unerring wisdom.

For a clearer apprehension of the subject, we should remember, that the office of a Governor

\* Gen. xviii. 25.

consists of two parts:—the exercise of *justice*, in the character of a *judge*;—and, the exercise of *benevolence*, in the character of a *benefactor*. Though the same person may act as a judge and as a benefactor, yet the offices themselves are perfectly distinct; and are to be ascertained from the relation they bear to their objects respectively. Nor can it be questioned, that the same object may be, at once, under the influence of benevolence and of justice. Thus God, in reference to individuals as well as to communities, ‘in the midst of judgment remembers mercy.’ It may seem, at first sight, that the character of a Governor, exercising prerogative, as distinguished from the office of a judge, amounts to something more than the exercise of benevolence. But this, I conceive, is a mistake, arising from false notions associated with the idea of royal prerogative, and which has been among men, the exuberant source of tyranny, oppression, and persecution in all ages. There is, accurately, no royal prerogative, whether human or divine, but for the *good* of the subject; for, when good laws are transgressed, the governor exercises only the office of a Judge in punishing the transgressor. When bad laws among men are disobeyed, and the offender is punished for disobeying them, one tyrannic act, implied in the formation of bad laws, is followed by another. But far be this

from 'the Judge of all the earth;' as his laws are perfectly 'holy, just, and good,' so he punishes none but those who transgress them. He exercises no prerogative to impose unrighteous laws, or to treat the innocent as if they were guilty.

The proper office of a judge is to administer justice according to law, or to give to every one his due. Sometimes indeed, among mankind, a portion of the royal prerogative is added to the office of a judge, in order to avoid the inconvenience of appealing to the throne, where judgment and mercy are supposed to be united. From these considerations it is plain, that a king, or any chief magistrate, is a faint representation of the supreme Governor, by whom 'kings reign, and princes decree justice.' He is their sublime and perfect model; and happy would it be for the world, if all governors were intent on imitating Him who is at once an equitable Judge and a kind Benefactor!

Jehovah is the King of all kings, and the Judge of all judges. He is *Supreme* in his nature, in all his attributes, and in all his proceedings; in the exercise of judgment and of mercy. But his royal prerogative, his wise and holy Sovereignty, he exercises only as a Benefactor. He is the *universal* Governor; he rules



among 'the armies of heaven,' as well as among 'the inhabitants of the earth.' Heaven, earth, and hell, are unveiled before him, and under his righteous and beneficent control. He is the *final* Governor; when subjects, magistrates, and princes shall have gone from the earth to their eternal abodes, and the remembrance of them shall have vanished as a dream, God will reign on an unshaken throne. He will still sustain the office of Governor, a sovereign Benefactor, and an equitable Judge, while heaven and hell are peopled by angels and men. From him there lies no appeal; and as it is the final, so it is the most perfect decision. For he is an *infallible* Governor; he will by no means 'clear the 'guilty,' as a Judge, nor will he condemn the innocent by prerogative. 'He accepteth not 'persons, nor taketh rewards,' could any thing be offered to him which he had not previously bestowed. He is 'a God of truth, and without 'iniquity; just and right is he.' 'Shall not the 'Judge of all the earth do right?'

From these remarks may we not clearly perceive the mistake of those who ascribe sovereignty to the character of a judge? What seems to have occasioned this error is the confounding of the idea of sovereignty with that of supremacy. Both ideas, indeed, belong to a chief Governor, but they refer to two offices in a

divided sense; supremacy belongs to each, but sovereignty only to one. It is true, in common discourse, these terms are sometimes taken interchangeably; and hence, because a Governor is a sovereign, it is hastily inferred that he is so in the whole of his character, which includes the ideas of a Benefactor and a Judge. A similar confusion of ideas has occasioned many abuses in human governments. How many weak tyrannical Governors have inferred, and would have had the governed to infer, that because they were acknowledged to be sovereigns, they were so in all respects, and had authority, in virtue of their character, to enact what laws they pleased, and to compel the observance of them by penal sanctions! Did they not, as universally conceded, derive their office from the appointment of God, and were they not his representatives on earth? Every one, therefore, who disobeyed their mandates, right or wrong in themselves, was justly punished. This is the true spirit of tyranny, whether among ecclesiastics or civilians. The divine character, however, is founded on different principles.

Much has been said on the subject of arbitrary *will*, and arbitrary *authority*, but often without proper discrimination. If, indeed, by the term arbitrary be meant capricious, to the exclusion of a wise regard to the public welfare,

the notion deserves unqualified censure; but if it express the idea of a sovereign right to exercise mercy in subserviency to the public good, or to confer undeserved favours, without injury to others, then we should beware of attaching to it any odium. A will or an authority may be just, without being sovereign; but *sovereign injustice*, when reduced to practice, is inexpressibly detestable. An arbitrary government that infringes upon right, to the injury of the community or of any individual, is directly opposed to the character of God.

From the view we have taken of the divine character, and the two-fold office it contains, we may perceive a scriptural, rational, and safe rule, whereby all the mixtures of good and evil among accountable beings may be referred to their respective sources. It is plain that good and evil, judgment and mercy, suffering and enjoyment, grief and happiness, pain and pleasure, are singularly blended, even in the same person, and at the same time. To say that they all proceed from one source, either in ourselves, or in God, is very convenient for preventing further exertion of thought and reflection; but it is at the expense of truth, and to the detriment of improvement in Christian knowledge. How then shall we analyze this compound, by what test shall we ascertain its component parts?

The subject, all but infidels must allow, is infinitely more interesting than any that ever can be investigated in the material world. If we would obtain clear and consistent ideas, in contemplating the moral world, we should consider what is *strictly due* to the object in question. Are existence, preservation, health and vigour, mental powers, morally good principles, and confirmed happiness, due to a creature, especially when fallen? Who is so ignorant or so vain as to assert it? They proceed, therefore, from God as a Sovereign, or as a supreme Benefactor. Do any suffer pain or punishment, grief or sorrow, of any kind, or in any degree? Let the question be put, Is it their due to be exempt? And, indeed, if we take a wider survey, and contemplate every animal that breathes, every insect that moves, every vegetable that grows, every atom that exists, compared with what is greater, better, more beautiful, or has any degree of superiority; the question may be still put, Why is this object inferior to another, why does it bear a subordinate part in the system of the world? The true answer is, Nothing more, nothing better is due to it. View the whole scale of created existence, from the highest intelligence to the lowest particle, and the same reply is applicable. On the other hand, if we take the same survey, and put the question in the reversed order, Does any being or thing

partake of a greater sum of existence, a more elegant form, or superior advantages, compared with what is inferior? In that degree it has more than is due to it, from sovereign bounty. In brief, in proportion as any creature has *more* than nothing, or a mere negation, it is the effect of *sovereign liberality*; and in proportion as the same creature has *less* than ulterior perfection, it is the effect of *equity*. So that these divine characters of Equity and Sovereignty reign not only in a moral system, but through the whole system of the universe.

In this manner we may safely argue, on indubitable principles, respecting the kingdom of providence, over which the supreme Governor presides. Sometimes, for instance, the weaker animals are oppressed or devoured by the stronger; but protection, protracted existence, and a favourable mode of being, are not due to the weaker from their great Proprietor; nor are the stronger, if not intelligent free agents, accountable to him. Man is the vicegerent of his Maker in this world, in point of dominion and government, though greatly degenerated by sin. As a free agent, he is capable of abusing his authority, both towards his own species and other creatures which are under his control, or at his disposal. For the exercise of this dominion he is accountable to the Lord of



all. He has a grant from him to ‘slay and eat,’ but not for wanton and merely selfish ends. He is allowed to use inferior creatures for his real improvement in subordination to God’s glory, but not capriciously to abuse any thing with impunity.

This important subject affords many useful and practical reflections. First, We may discover a source of humiliation and calm submission under our sufferings. Of humiliation, because we deserve all we suffer, and much more. We may pertinently ask, why should ‘a living man complain;’ a sinful man, whose demerits are so great? Of submission, because the righteous Judge cannot do wrong. He inflicts no evil, he suffers no ill to befall us, but what justice requires, in reference to our unworthiness in his sight, even when the infliction is most oppressive and cruel on the part of wicked men. These are accountable to the supreme Governor, who knows how to over-rule all our sufferings, even unto death, for our good and his own glory. In short, for any creature to be exposed to the evil of suffering, when not in any respect deserved, would be contrary to infinite rectitude.

Secondly, From the view we have taken of the supreme Governor we may infer, that all *discriminating* favours conferred on the subjects

of his government proceed from Sovereignty, as it respects them, but from Equity as it respects himself. For example, a predestination to eternal happiness of some of the fallen human race, is of his mere 'good pleasure,' as it respects their original desert, their prior state and character; but it is a matter of right or equity, when the divine character is the object of consideration. In other words, it is infinitely *due* to God, that he should confer benefits on any creature under the direction of unerring wisdom, though such benefits are not *due* to their objects. The same is true as it regards a mitigation of deserved punishment, or of any suffering: and the rule is applicable to restraining favour. These are not due to us; but it is due to infinite benevolence to dispense favours according to wisdom. In brief, God as a Sovereign conducts himself towards his subjects in a manner irrespective of their merit or demerit; but as an equitable Judge he regards merely what is their due, according to the laws of his government, which are founded in truth and righteousness. Are favours conferred on any persons, at any time, in any manner, or to any degree? It is due to infinite perfection to do this. Are any privations, pains, or sufferings experienced, or are the guilty consigned to misery without end? It is due to infinite perfection to exercise justice in this way.

Thirdly, We perceive an adequate ground of acquiescence in the decision of God, 'when 'he judgeth,' in all possible cases. It cannot be that he who is infinitely perfect should act in a manner unworthy of himself. The infallible rectitude of his conduct and decision is founded on the rectitude of his nature; for every will operates according to the nature of the person willing. And even supposing it possible for him to do wrong, what could induce him to deviate from universal righteousness and equity? When a human judge departs from the rule of absolute right, it is either because the law according to which he judges is not perfect, or from his own ignorance, prejudice, envy, or malice, for the sake of gain, partial honour, or the like; but as the 'righteous judge' has no imperfect law as his rule, so he 'cannot be 'tempted of evil,' nor has he any conceivable, any possible inducements to act unworthily.

Fourthly, We may see the true sources of heaven and hell, or ultimate happiness and misery. Heaven, with all its happiness, proceeds from, and is supported by sovereign benevolence, the direction of which to its objects, according to wisdom, is the right of God, as due to his nature. But hell, with all its misery, proceeds from moral evil as the demerit of the sufferers, and from divine holiness and justice

directed against the rebellious subjects of equitable government. ‘The *wages* of sin is death; but the *gift* of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ The songs of the blessed in heaven resound to the praise of Grace, Mercy, and Love: ‘Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests.—Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.—Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.’ The wailings of the miserable in hell, are, Thou art a hard master, too holy, too just, too powerful; thou art a consuming fire, and thy opposition to us is intolerable. We inhabit outer darkness, the den of foul fiends, unquenchable flames. Our worm never dieth. Here restless confusion, gloomy reflections, conscious agonies, and rebellious, fruitless opposition, ever torment us.

Fifthly, In the preceding views of the divine character as a Governor we find a fair solution to many popular, and some subtle objections. For example, it has been asked, Does not Election imply ‘accepting persons?’ By no means;

for all must allow, it is a part of Sovereign Prerogative to confer benefits, provided that conduct be founded on reasons of wisdom. No one is wronged, because the discriminating favour is not *due* to any one. Again, it has been asked, Does not the limitation or mitigation of deserved punishment argue ‘unjust partiality?’ Not in the least; for this also is a branch of Sovereign Prerogative. In all such instances God proceeds according to the rule of right, or what is due to his infinite nature. Some, indeed, have contended that punishment is the act of a Sovereign. But for this there is no ground, except in the equivocal and less proper use of that expression, when taken for the operation of supreme Justice towards the guilty. To punish is, indubitably, the office of a Judge, or the exercise of justice with respect to guilt incurred; and the offence is not a decreed effect. ‘As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.’ In the object there is a just cause of displeasure, which neither was nor could be decreed; and therefore it is not a matter of *sovereign* pleasure that suffering should follow sin unpardoned and guilt unremoved. In short, the evil of suffering is the necessary effect of being found guilty and sinful; as necessary as that God is unchangeably holy and just. If indeed sinful demerit were decreed to take place,



then punishment would be so too in a direct manner.

Let the reader seriously reflect, whether he deliberately rejects God as 'his portion,' and holiness as the way to the enjoyment of his favour and friendship; whether he cleaves to idols of his own imagination, and seeks the 'water of life' from the 'broken cisterns' of created good. If so, God's nature, his holiness and justice, his infinite rectitude, stand opposed to him. The moth which encounters a devouring flame must be consumed. Let no one excuse himself from a vain and unfounded supposition that a sovereign decree cannot be resisted; for he who lives and dies in the service of sin requires no decree to ensure his misery. Let none say, 'If our transgressions and sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?' for God has formed no unconditional decree to punish any one, as if all attempts at conversion were useless. Thus saith the Lord, 'Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?'

SECT. II.

*Of Man as a Subject of God's Moral Government.*

MAN may be contemplated in two principal points of view; either as he was *created*, or as he is actually found to be in his *present* state. As to the first of these, the inspired history of his formation states, that he was made ‘in the ‘image’ or ‘after the likeness’ of the Creator; and an inspired interpreter of that history assures us, that this likeness consisted in ‘knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.’ The original account is, ‘Let us make man in our image, ‘after our likeness—so God created man in his ‘own image, in the image of God created he ‘him; male and female created he them.’\* In allusion to this sacred record, Saint Paul represents real Christians as having ‘put on the new ‘man which is renewed in knowledge, after the ‘image of him that created him.’† And elsewhere, when exhorting to a spiritual renovation of the mind, he adds, ‘and that ye put on the ‘new man, which after God is created in ‘righteousness and true holiness.’‡ On these passages of holy writ, we may remark,—that the

\* Gen. i. 26, 27. v. 1, 2. † Col. iii. 10. ‡ Eph. iv. 24.

subject of this likeness must, from the nature of the case, be infinitely inferior to the original;—that the ‘image or likeness’ refers not to man’s corporeal form, but to his mental capacities and endowments;—that it consisted partly in an exalted kind of *intellect*, which was capable of contemplating not only sensible objects, but also the adorable Creator and spiritual realities;—that this capable intellect was furnished with actual knowledge suited to its nature, and especially a knowledge of God as the chief good;—that the heart or nature of man was perfectly righteous, or strictly conformable to the holy will and nature of God;—that he was endowed with the faculty of will and moral freedom, whereby he was capacitated to choose the good and refuse the evil, according to the representation of his intellect;—and, finally, that in his original constitution, he chose God as his chief end, and every other object in subserviency to this end, whereby all his faculties and their exercise were truly holy.

From this representation, founded on the testimony of scripture, and which right reason cannot but approve, it appears, that man, as a subject of moral government, in a state of original probation, had a CAPACITY of enjoying the chief good, which capacity includes intellect and will; and being then perfect, he

actually enjoyed the chief good, and every inferior good in a regular subordination to that higher end. He had, moreover, suitable and sufficient objective MEANS to preserve that enjoyment. Being perfectly holy, he was also completely happy. In the harmony of his powers and passions there was not one jarring chord; not one of the numerous objects around him was either over-valued or under-valued. Every disposition, every inclination, every thought and desire, every volition and action, was exactly as it ought to be. This was the state, the intelligent, righteous, and holy state of Adam and Eve before their first transgression. ‘God made man upright.’ And ‘God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it WAS VERY GOOD.’

But is this the present state of man? Sad experience, it is too evident, proves the contrary. This is the other point of view in which man should be contemplated. Let us then endeavour to observe mankind with calm attention and the most impartial discernment. It is allowed that the external actions of men are the best evidences to us of their dispositions and their true state. Scriptural statements of human depravity are very strong and abundant; but those who have a preconceived hypothesis to support, exert their critical ingenuity to lessen

their evidence, or to explain them away. 'Facts,' however, 'are stubborn things;' and as an appeal is made to reason, we need not shrink from its legitimate principles as one medium of proof. And, first, if man be not degenerated, that is, if he have not transgressed the line of perfect moral rectitude, he is possessed of a beatifying knowledge of supreme excellence; every act of his will is conformable to the will and holy nature of God; nor are there any conflicts or discordant propensities of the passions. Every object is exactly estimated and deliberately chosen in such a manner as to be followed with perfect satisfaction, and without any regret upon reflection. His freedom, in no instance, is abused, and his conscience must never reproach him for a wrong election. Secondly, if it be found a fact, that the chief good is neglected or under-valued, then the path of moral rectitude is transgressed; and if this be a universal fact, including every person from earliest life, (and how soon do we mark selfishness and other wrong tempers in days of infancy?) it forms an irrefragable proof that all mankind are degenerate. This statement, in general, cannot, I conceive, be controverted; nor does there appear, among the present race of men, any plea of individual exception.

The appeal is now made to impartial reason,



whether the verdict of inspired documents be not the language of sobriety and truth, that 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;' and that 'there is none righteous, no not one,' in the same manner and to the same degree as the first human pair. Where is the human being who can consistently assert, that he is what he ought to be, without begging the question that his defects and failures are of divine causation? Remove this preposterous assumption, and every one must stand convicted, even in his own judgment, at the bar of his own reason, that he is a delinquent, a transgressor of divine law, and therefore obnoxious to its awful sanctions. The rule of moral actions is perfect, but man in his present state is imperfect; consequently he lies exposed to its righteous penalty. The darkness of his understanding and the depravity of his disposition, be the degree what it may, by no means excuse him from subjection to the moral Governor. His departure from perfect moral rectitude makes no difference in his obligation; otherwise it would follow, either, that he was incapable of abusing his liberty without, at the same time, freeing himself from future obligations, or, that on such an abuse God is bound to restore him immediately to perfect rectitude, in order to qualify him for being obliged,—each of which is absurd. In reality, the more an inclination

to obey is wanting, the more culpable he is; which must be the case, except we say that our moral ability remains the same after disobedience as it was before; and then it would follow that our moral ability for obedience undergoes, in that respect, no inconvenience from innumerable transgressions; which is directly contrary to the well known fact of moral habits.

From the preceding considerations it appears, that the present moral state of man is very different from what it was when he was created, as to knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. Nevertheless, this by no means implies that his *natural faculties* of understanding and will have lost any property essential to them. The most erroneous mind, in a moral sense, may have a great vigour of intellect, and a great force of will. Nor is man's *freedom*, in the sense before explained, diminished or altered. Many, indeed, and especially the first protestant reformers, have strenuously contended that since the first apostacy the human will is *enslaved*. On a slight view, these two statements appear to be discrepant, but in reality they are not, because they refer to different things. For as the freedom asserted is a negative idea, denoting exemption from constraint and restraint, it is predicated of the will as a privilege from God; and the

meaning is, that HE does not enslave it. But when it is asserted that the will is enslaved, the meaning is, that it is under the influence and direction of a depraved heart, and a dark understanding. On the part of God, therefore, the will is ever free, through every stage of human existence; but on the part of man's internal principle of action, it is enslaved in proportion to the moral depravity of that principle, because the operations of the will are invariably as the representations of the understanding and the principle of the agent.

In this connexion it may be useful to trace and illustrate the respective operations of the understanding and the will of man in his present state of imperfection, in reference to his moral actions, in order to discover the ground of their criminality, the equity of their condemnation, and our need of pardoning mercy and assisting grace. We have seen that man, in his original state of perfection, was possessed of such a degree of spiritual knowledge as was adequate to a state of righteousness and true holiness. He must have had an illuminating principle, by which he had a spiritual apprehension of God, and of all other objects presented to him. Whether these were many or few, he regarded them all in subserviency to God and his own happiness. But in the present state, abstracted

from a gracious principle, we daily find, by indubitable experience, the following facts: First, that the understanding is enveloped in *ignorance of God*, and of the value of other objects as related to him. ‘The foolish heart is darkened.’ Its pristine light resembled that of open day, or the unclouded sun at noon; but that of our present unrenovated state resembles more a torch or a candle in a dark night. It should be particularly noticed that this mental power, the understanding, in the degenerate state of man, has no apprehension of *God in his own light*, even when heard of ‘by the hearing of the ear.’ And when any one destitute of this light speaks of him, he only ‘darkens counsel by words ‘without knowledge.’ The excellency of his nature, and the glories of his perfections, are not perceived.

Secondly, This darkness of the understanding is the *natural effect* of transgression, and not the result of an arbitrary judgment from God: as if he inflicted on his erring creature some positive influence in the way of punishment. The truth is, that he is left to himself by his equitable Governor. He was neither allured nor impelled to a state of darkness by his Maker; but he withdrew himself from the light by preferring those objects which have obscured his mind. Thirdly, The understanding makes but a mere

*representation* of such objects as are in the view of the mind, they having no active influence on the will; and therefore, such representation, whether the objects be few or many, does not ensure the right use of them. Indeed, to produce this effect was never the province of the understanding in a state of perfection, and therefore cannot be its province in its present state.

In order to ascertain how the will is qualified to improve the objects thus represented to it by the understanding, we should consider, first, the nature of the will; which is that faculty of the mind that has good for its object, and which it is appointed, by the great and beneficent Author of our being, instinctively and invariably to seek. Secondly, the will, though an original faculty, is only the *medium* of power, or that faculty by which power operates. Thirdly, both the will and the power by which it acts, depend on the principle or the *nature* of the agent in all moral determinations. Therefore, fourthly, the nature of every moral agent, from the most perfect to the most imperfect, is the *radical source* of all moral actions. From the nature proceed the power and the volition; and as the nature is, so will be the choice as good or evil, in all moral agents whatever. Thus from the nature of God proceeds the exercise of his power and will, and according to his nature are his



volitions, 'holy, just, and good:' and the same law is invariably applicable to all intelligent agents; to Jesus Christ, to holy angels, to perfect Adam, to his imperfect descendants, and to all apostate beings.

Hence we see, first, the absurdity of regarding the WILL as a *self-determining power*, whether we consider it in reference to God, or to Man formed after his image; for the nature of the agent, invariably, determines the will. Secondly, the choice is as the greatest *apparent* good; for the will can choose nothing but as it is represented by the understanding; and this can view no object accurately, as God, or other objects as properly related to him, while the nature of the agent is destitute of that spiritual light which he enjoyed in a state of integrity. Consequently, the apparent good chosen, will never coincide with what is really good, but in proportion as the understanding of the agent is enlightened. Thirdly, to suppose that the will does not choose, in all cases, the greatest *apparent* good, involves this absurdity, that we choose in some cases what upon the whole we deem best not to choose; which is the same as to maintain that we choose evil, as evil, which is evidently incompatible with our mental constitution.

Man, therefore, in the present state, may be

compared to one who employs the light of a taper for the purpose of seeking an eligible object. We may suppose him situated in a large room (for such is the surrounding universe) which is abundantly stored with objects, some valuable, and many unsuitable to his immediate real wants, and therefore to him worthless. Whatever his imperfect understanding perceives, of that he forms an estimate; and he cannot but give the preference to what appears to him, all things considered, preferable. Now, considering man thus circumstanced, his criminality consists in his adopting those objects of choice which, as he may know from his own consciousness, do not contain the chief good he needs, and which he is instinctively seeking. Having ‘forsaken ‘the fountain of living waters,’ he is perpetually engaged in ‘hewing out to himself cisterns, ‘broken cisterns, that can hold no water.’ He has recourse to one idol after another, little suspecting his radical mistake, that God is not in his thoughts or desires. He does not improve the objects and means with which he is conversant, in order to acquire and possess the chief good. That appears to him most eligible, in the act of choosing, which a mind morally upright views as not preferable; and that appears to him a thing to be chosen for its own sake, which ought to be chosen for a higher end.

Moreover, the will of man, in his present imperfect state, under the guidance of the understanding, while in quest of moral truth and happiness, resembles a traveller who aims at his wished for home. Were it perfect day, he might discern a straight, plain path; but being overtaken by the night, introduced by sin, he has only a faint light 'shining in a dark place,' to direct him. Beside, he has wandered, and actually lost his path. His will, however, being set upon his home, some step must be taken. This is man's present state, and the truth of the representation any one might ascertain, if he were but impartially attentive to the operations of his own mind. Now the question is, since a deviation from rectitude and a forfeiture of spiritual life do not, and indeed cannot discharge him from obligation, what is his duty? I answer, it consists in his employing what light he has in order to discover the right path which leads to happiness in God, which is the chief end and the chief good of the soul; and his criminality consists in his growing indifferent about the path of safety, and indulging an idolatrous satisfaction with what he may be conscious is not the good and the happiness he needs. The will ought to abandon every false resting place, and earnestly desire light from the 'Father of lights,' which may shine upon its path. Then only can the understanding be a safe guide to the will

when it is illuminated from heaven; and without this illumination the glories of the divine perfections will not appear, much less the mysteries of redeeming love and mercy. And, in reality, until the understanding be supernaturally enlightened, the genuine beauty and glory of the works of creation, preservation, and providence, are not discerned; because the relation they bear to God, his holiness and justice, his goodness and mercy, his wisdom and sovereignty, can be perceived only through the medium of a divine irradiation. ‘In thy light shall we see light.’

The sum of what has been advanced is this: God has given to the soul of man, as a firm and invariable principle, a tendency towards good and happiness in general; but the will never chooses what is not represented to it by the understanding. The will, however, is capable of renouncing a good represented, and a happiness enjoyed of an inferior kind, though a better does not actually and distinctly appear; because the soul may be conscious, that what it possesses is not the chief good, is not its ultimate happiness; conscious, that it has not attained to its original destination, and that a greater good is attainable, than any which it has yet experienced. Thus the soul’s general tendency to ultimate good and happiness keeps it ever in

expectation, through every stage of life, and in all its various pursuits. Its fault, therefore, or moral failure and criminality, consists in a temporary but idolatrous *resting* in what is not the chief good of man; and this idolatry is committed not only when an inferior good is falsely deemed preferable to another, but also when any created good whatever is not chosen with reference to the chief, and in subordination to it. This statement is founded in fact, in universal and impartial experience, to which the appeal is now made.

According to Equity, in a system of moral government, man's obligation to be perfectly conformable to a good law, is not in proportion to *subjective light* in his understanding, but to *objective means* suited to his chief end. For if, through his own fault, he is destitute of a right perception of God and other things related to him, his obligation to perceive aright cannot cease without involving the most absurd consequences. For, first, it would imply, that the more dark the mind is, though surrounded with the most excellent means of knowledge, the less is it accountable for its use or abuse of them; and, secondly, the notion is incompatible with the idea of a moral system, which necessarily implies a possibility of losing the light once enjoyed as a righteous forfeiture. The exhibition



of means, therefore, with the preservation of our natural faculties and moral freedom, must, through every period of our existence, be the basis of obligation and accountability. And thus all men are without excuse, because ‘the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, even his eternal power and God-head,’ are exhibited to their understandings; and therefore, whether they clearly perceive and rightly understand what is thus exhibited or not, their obligation is the same. And in proportion as any have additional objective discoveries, they are additionally obliged to improve them in the same degree.

The scale of means according to which men are obliged, in a moral sense, admits of degrees innumerable, from conscious existence to the fullest and clearest testimonies of revelation. A mind suitably disposed and reasonably affected with merely the human frame, supposing every other object were sealed up in darkness, might devoutly say, ‘I am not my own maker, preserver, or proprietor, but the work and property of some wise, powerful, and benevolent Being; I will therefore devote myself perpetually to his disposal.’ Thus the most benighted of human kind is not destitute of means abundantly sufficient to establish his accountability. And if so, what excuse can they offer who live in

the land of 'open vision,' to whom 'the gospel 'of God, that bringeth salvation,' is announced in the plainest manner, accompanied with a full blaze of external evidence? How inconceivably great must be their obligations! Surely these blessings, high as heaven and deep as our greatest wants, demand no small share of affectionate reception and grateful obedience.

But what is the real fact with respect to men's improvement of the means they have? Can it be shewn that there ever existed, since the first delinquency of Adam, any mere man of whom it may be said, that he was as perfect as he had means of being so? Among reflecting persons, there can be but one opinion upon the subject. Here, then, is an incontrovertible ground of personal culpableness and exposure to penal evil, its necessary effect. If God, therefore, should 'mark iniquity,' and give to every one his due, who could avoid the doom of 'the wicked and unprofitable servant?'—'All 'are gone out of the way, they are together 'become unprofitable; there is none that doeth 'good, no, not one. Every mouth is stopped, 'and all the world is become guilty before God.' In this state of delinquency and guilt, of darkness and uncertainty, 'ever learning but never coming 'to the knowledge of the truth,' divine revelation finds the children of men. It offers a

brighter light and a surer clue, than any they possess, and proposes a divine leader to conduct them into all necessary truth. But alas! ‘men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil,’ and this aggravates their condemnation. When left to themselves, all men ‘walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.’ Christ is exhibited as the life of men, but they ‘will not come to him that they might have life;’ he is proposed to them as ‘the sun of righteousness’ and ‘the light of the world;’ but in their degeneracy they prefer walking in the shadow of death and on the brink of perdition, deliberately refusing his proffered benefits. Hence the justice of their final ruin, and its aggravation in proportion to the advantages proposed.

Here it is natural to ask, Whence proceed these defects,—darkness, depravity, and confusion, through successive ages? We may observe, in the first place, that the human mind, in all possible modes and stages of its existence, is related to, as inseparable from it, a *negative* principle of defectibility. Had it not been for this, Adam *never could* have sinned, either through inadvertence, temptation, or any thing

else. In the second place, as mankind do not coexist independently, but rise to existence in succession, we are bound to regard the whole human race as one great system, of which every succeeding part depends on the preceding, as much as any succeeding species of plants, for instance, depends on the first plant of that species. If the first parent of our race lost his felicitous integrity, prior to his having any descendants, by what possible expedient, except by a sovereign righteousness and gracious influence, can we conceive of his posterity as being afterwards possessed of it? Any other supposition is as unreasonable as that streams of water may rise higher than their source, according to the constituted laws of nature, or that we 'may gather grapes from thorns, and figs 'from thistles.' 'Can a fig tree bear olive-berries, or a vine figs?' then, indeed, may the offspring of depraved Adam be conceived to spring into existence conformably to the moral standard of their original nature, or possessed of holiness and happiness. 'By one man sin 'entered into the world,' the system of mankind, 'and death by sin;' not only the dissolution of the body followed, (which in case of continued perfection would have been prevented) but, what is far more important, 'the spirit of 'life' departed from the soul. As a tree withers when the vital sap is gone, and the animal dies

when the vital principle ceases to operate; so the spiritual life, or the well-being of an accountable creature, departs, when righteousness, holiness, and happiness in God, are lost.

The only objection, I conceive, that can be made to this statement, with any degree of plausibility, is the following:—If human souls be united to their bodies by immediate creation, and not according to the operations of providential laws in the propagation of other animal species, they must be as pure, that is, righteous and holy, as the soul of Adam; since it would be unworthy of God to create them otherwise. Now, setting aside all controversy respecting the truth or falsehood of the supposition, for argument' sake I shall admit the hypothesis; and observe, First, that it is impossible to conceive of any created substance unconnected with a 'root of mutability;'<sup>\*</sup> in other words, a

<sup>\*</sup> The celebrated F. TURRETTIN observes, 'if God were 'not absolutely immutable he would have in himself *potentiam passivam, radicem mutabilitatis,* *passive power, the root of mutability.* Instit. Theol. Loc. III. Q. v. § 7. See also Q. vii. § 4. Q. xi. § 4. &c. &c.—The *idea* which is intended to be conveyed by these expressions, and which is essential to several parts of this Essay, has excited some attention; and as the charge of novelty, as well as of impropriety, has been advanced against the *term* PASSIVE POWER, it may not be amiss to take notice of it here. This is not the place, however, to discuss the charge of impropriety; I shall therefore



*negative principle* of defectibility. Secondly, allowing it to be unworthy of God to create a human soul otherwise than pure at the first moment of its existence, it does not follow that it must be so the next moment; for its *well* being is not essential to its *being*, as universal

attend to that of novelty only. ‘I do not remember,’ says Dr. REID, ‘to have met with the phrase *passive power* in any other good author. Mr. LOCKE seems to have been unlucky ‘in inventing it.’ (Active Powers of Man, Ess. 1. Ch. iii.) Surely either the Doctor’s memory was uncommonly defective at the time he wrote this, or else his reading must have been very partial. Did he never read GALE’s Court of the Gentiles, C. WOLFIUS’s Philosophia Prima, or BRUCKER’s History of Philosophy? If these are not ‘good authors,’ on the different subjects which employed their pens, his notions of good authorship must be of a very ‘novel’ cast. Dr. ENFIELD was not intimidated by REID’s unfounded remark: ‘Power is ‘either active or passive; active power is the principle of ‘motion, or change, acting upon another substance; *passive* ‘power subsists in the subject upon which active power is exercised. These are correlatives, and cannot be separated.’ (History of Philosophy, vol. i. p. 279.) The present question is not whether ARISTOTLE and the *best writers* of his school used the phrase with the strictest propriety, but whether, on their own principles, they were ‘good authors?’ And how, moreover, could Dr. REID impute to LOCKE the *invention* of a phrase which had been of standing use in the schools of philosophy for above two thousand years? LOCKE very well knew that the Greek and Latin phrases used in the philosophic schools could not be translated into English more literally than by ‘passive power;’ and this translation had been made long before ready to his hand. How, then, could HE be said ‘to have been unlucky in inventing it?’

fact proves. Thirdly, God is under no obligation, in Equity, to preserve any creature in purity and the perfection of its nature; otherwise there could be no actual defection in the universe. Fourthly, the proper nature of sin, whether in actions or dispositions, is a *defect* of righteousness and holiness, which defect God alone, by the exercise of a sovereign prerogative, can counteract; for it is not conceivable that any creature has an equitable claim upon him for the continuance of any *favour*, whether created with it, or added afterwards. Fifthly, the purity and perfect nature of a human soul, in every successive moment of its existence, is an undeserved favour, whereby the root of its mutability, its want of ulterior perfection, or its inseparable negative source of defectibility, is prevented from shewing itself. In a word, remove the absurd assumption, too long imagined, that original sin is something *positive*, rather than *negative*, and the whole difficulty vanishes. What is *essential* to the soul continues through every stage, its natural faculties, and, on the part of God, its moral freedom; but what constitutes its continued, and its restored, moral purity, perfection, and happiness in vital union to God, is not its equitable due, but a superadded gracious gift. This rationally vindicates the whole scriptural account of original sin,—in harmony with the Equity and Sovereignty of God.

## SECT. III.

*Of the Moral Rule according to which Man is governed.*

WE now proceed to consider the rule of *right* according to which the supreme Ruler governs his human subjects, or that on which his own conduct is founded in reference to man. On this important subject there are two sentiments of radical consideration. The first is, that the *Will* of God is the ultimate source of right; or, that any thing he commands is right merely because he wills it. In my apprehension, this is not an innocent mistake, but in its legitimate consequences a very dangerous error, though some persons of great learning and respectability have adopted it. It is allowed by all that a human legislator and judge, when he acts in character, wills a thing because it is *just*, or according to the truth of relations: and ‘shall not the Judge of all the earth do *right*?’ When, indeed, the will of God and the will of Man are put in competition, it would be absurd to dispute about the preference, because the divine will is infallibly perfect. We are not to confound the *evidence* of truth, and the *source* of it. To us, it is admitted, it is a sufficient *evidence* that a

thing is right because God wills it; and ‘thus  
‘saith the Lord’ demands our faith and obedience; but the supposition of a supreme will without a rule of right according to which it is directed, is equally false and dishonourable to God.

According to the sentiment I am now opposing, it might have been right in God to command, in addressing man, ‘Thou shalt *hate* the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy soul.’ If it be said that God is not capable of doing this, I ask, Why not capable? If his will has no rule of right, his doing so could not be wrong. And were his will a supreme rule to himself, he might clear the guilty or condemn the innocent, as well as the contrary. On that principle, what harm or impropriety would there be in his breach of promise? Beside, this notion leads directly to the absurd consequence of the will being a self-determining power, or the operation of will without a previous ground of willing, which is the same as to assert an effect without a cause. And those who claim this property for the human will, would do well to establish the previous question, Whether such a property belongs to the divine will, which, as they contend, is the great exemplar after which the will of man is formed? This, I am satisfied,

they can never effect; nor prove that there is a *self-determining will* in the possibility of things.

The second sentiment respecting the rule of right to which I before alluded, as of radical consideration on the subject, is the reverse of what we have been considering; viz. that God wills or commands a thing because it is right. If this were not the fact, what consistent meaning could there be in Abraham's approved language, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth *'do right?'* On the other supposition, there could be neither good nor evil, right nor wrong, in any thing previous to his willing it. But, it will be asked, Can there be any thing superior to the will of God, to which that will may be conformable, and according to which it is directed? Undoubtedly there is, and with the same evidence of truth as that his nature is uncaused, and the rectitude of it independent of his will. The rule of right, therefore, according to which the will of God operates and governs, is the infinite and eternal rectitude of his nature. This is, demonstrably, the ultimate standard of right and truth, of goodness and wisdom, and according to which his power and will operate. And as he is a Being of infinite perfection, having no root of mutability, no negative principle of defectibility, self-existent and independent, his



will must be always *right*. Will, in accurate conception, as before observed, is a medium of power, and both power and will operate, invariably, according to the nature of the agent.

These things premised, we shall now enquire into the nature of that moral rule, or law, according to which man is governed by the supreme Ruler. When we say, It is *the will of God*, we only give it a denomination; but our present enquiry relates to the *nature* of the thing so denominated. Nor is it sufficient, in this investigation, to say, that the law is a *rule of action given by a superior*; because, though a truth, it does not conduct our ideas beyond mere will, which, in strictness, is not the *standard* of right, but its *expression*. We say then that the *nature* of that rule or law which is the great standard of moral government over mankind, is, The RELATION subsisting between the divine Governor and man the governed. And there seems to be no other satisfactory method of ascertaining this relation but by forming accurate conceptions of the true characters of the beings related. God is a being of all possible perfection; self-existent, independent, and all-sufficient; infinitely benevolent, wise, and powerful; so just, that he gives to every one his due to the full extent of his true claim; and so sovereign, that he never fails to secure his own

ends, which are ever benevolent and wise. MAN is a being absolutely dependant on God for his existence, capacities, and operations; possessed of moral freedom, and capable of knowing and loving God. In a word, he is capable of religion, a property which belongs to no other creature in our world.

We observe, again, that God *exhibits* to mankind his adorable Being and perfections by different modes, in a manner less or more explicit; and *bestows* upon them favours and benefits unnumbered. Man's corporeal exigencies are provided for; means of comfort are pointed out in the various ways of providence; every faculty and affection has presented to it a corresponding good; so that nothing but his blindness and moral depravity prevents his enjoyment of all that happiness which he originally possessed, and of which he is still capable. This is the subsisting relation which constitutes that rule of moral government which may be called the *moral law*, which the sacred scriptures express in different forms, and frequently inculcate. Its requisitions are summarily comprehended in these two ideas,—SUPREME *love* to GOD, and DISINTERESTED *love* to our fellow MEN, our enemies not excepted. That part of God's revealed will which is commonly termed 'the ten commandments,' includes

a most important and comprehensive summary of moral duties, (with which is incorporated something of a positive nature with corresponding sanctions) adapted to peculiar circumstances; and which, as a whole, may be considered as the *formula* of the Mosaic establishment, or the grand *constitution* on which the Mosaic laws are founded.

Hence we see that the moral law is not, as vulgarly imagined, some separate thing which may be abstractedly considered without any reference to the characters of God and of man; but its very existence, its extent and degree of obliging power, bear an exact proportion to these characters, in connexion with the *representations* which God makes of himself to man, and the *benefits* conferred upon him. In himself, God is always the same, but men have different capacities, moral means, and opportunities; ‘for as many as have sinned without law, (i. e. a revelation of the will of God) shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, (i. e. under a revelation) shall be judged by the law.’ Relations are constituted by creation, providence, and grace. The discovery of new relations, arising from benefits exhibited or conferred, produces new obligations, according to the diversified circumstances of different subjects. ‘To whom much is given,

‘ of him much is required.’ ‘ To some are given  
‘ five talents, to others two, and to others one ;  
‘ to every man according to his several ability.’

It is necessary to observe, that the obliging law results, not merely from what man is now, but also from what the human system was originally. If God’s conduct towards our first father was equitable; if it was right that mankind should exist by succession, and that the son should be as the father; and if the transgression of a law does not diminish its authority to oblige—it follows, that all Adam’s posterity are bound to be as perfect as he was, according to the objective means afforded. All mankind have the stupendous monuments of creation and providence set before them, by which ‘ the  
‘ invisible things of God may be known,’ his being, power, wisdom, and goodness; and, were there no guilty defect in their disposition, they would continually devote themselves to him without reserve. But alas! ‘ darkness hath  
‘ covered the earth, and gross darkness the  
‘ people.’ Millions among whom ‘ the true  
‘ light now shineth,’ objectively, remain in the most deplorable ignorance of God and his revealed will. ‘ The light shineth in darkness,  
‘ and the darkness comprehendeth it not.’

Before we close this head of discussion, it

may be proper to add, that God has enacted, from time to time, *positive laws*, which, to the subjects on whom they are obligatory, have no *apparent reason* of injunction beside the mere authority of the Lawgiver. Yet this authority, being decisively manifested, introduces the subject into new circumstances of relation, and therefore he becomes morally obliged to observe them. In short, as the divine authority never enjoins natural impossibilities, and as the manifestation of the supreme will, which is incapable of erring, is a sufficient reason why we should comply with its requisitions, there arises an obligation even from moral considerations, to obey all positive commands.\*

\* See the subject of positive laws and institutions, with the method of ascertaining what is *positive* and what is *moral* in the same command, in *Antipædob. Exam.* Vol. I. chap. i. *passim*.—See also, further observations on the *Will of God* as the *rule of moral government* in a *Discourse on the Influence of religious Practice on our Inquiries after Truth*, p. 13—20, 31.



## CHAP. IV. A

## OF MORAL GOVERNMENT AS IT RELATES TO THE DIFFERENT DISPENSATIONS OF REVEALED RELIGION.

## SECT. I.

*Of Moral Government as it respects the Dispensations of Revealed Religion in general, and particularly from Adam to Moses.*

NO sooner had our progenitor, Adam, transgressed the positive command of the supreme Governor, than the execution of the penal sanction followed. The command was, ‘Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.’ Were we to indulge curiosity, many enquiries might be here instituted respecting this tree and its fruit, the species, its physical qualities, &c. &c. But this would lead us into the philosophy of *conjecture*, (of which there is enough in the present day) and to vain and unprofitable speculations. We may rest assured, that the command was founded in wisdom, that it was highly suitable to the circumstances of the moral subjects, and that the sanction was not inequitable. As penal evil is the *necessary* effect of transgression, the

*threatening* was a declaration of that effect. A spiritual death, therefore, must have seized the soul immediately; or, what may be denominated, most emphatically, the *life*, the well-being, of a perfect creature, forsook it. And though the death of the body did not immediately follow, obnoxiousness to it was incurred, and the sentence of the Judge was pronounced accordingly. ‘And unto Adam he said,—In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’ As if he had said, Thou art no longer to expect my sovereign interposition to prevent that mortality to which, by the common laws of the universe, thy frame tends. Thus, ‘by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passeth upon all.’

Observing that among men there awaits every conditional engagement a permanent consequence on either side, some have been led to enquire, What would have been the consequence of Adam’s continued obedience? To this enquiry different answers have been given, not one of which, I conceive, needs to be noticed, because the question overlooks the nature of the subject. For it might as well be asked, What would have been another plan of creation and providence, if the present had not been adopted?

And this again would lead us to the fruitless enquiry, In how many different ways was it possible for God to form a universe? Every thing in the plan actually adopted proceeds on the supposition of Adam's apostacy; therefore to suppose his constant obedience, is not only to suppose an alteration in a *single part* of the divine scheme, but to substitute *another system*. Though we discard the unfounded notion of Adam's apostacy being decreed, and the self-contradictory notion of a divine 'decree to 'permit' it; it was foreseen in its adequate cause, and the divine plan proceeds on that fore-knowledge.

Nearly allied to the preceding question, is, What must have been the consequence respecting *fallen* Adam's posterity in this world, on supposition that no Saviour had been provided?—This, as well as the former enquiry, overlooks the nature of the subject; and takes for granted that the consequence might have taken place, without supposing another world. Whereas the truth is, that since the present plan of things, in all its parts, proceeds on the supposition of a Saviour provided, to suppose this removed is to suppose *another universe*. On the whole, relative to all such questions, we may remark, If there were no 'second Adam, the Lord from 'heaven,' how can it be shewn to have been

worthy of either the goodness or wisdom of God to appoint a *first* Adam, who he foresaw would fall as the *representative* of his posterity? Nor can it be shewn to be consistent with a full display of his rectoral *Equity* and sovereign *Mercy*, that he should so have interposed as to secure Adam's *continuance* in the state in which he was first placed. As far, therefore, as the providence and government of God are concerned in the present state of things, we may safely assert, 'whatever is, is RIGHT.'

Seeing, then, that only on the *present plan* does there appear that any room could be left for an admixture and wise display of divine *Equity* and *Mercy*, we may easily perceive how well adapted it is, above every other *supposed* plan, for the full exercise of moral government. But that we may the more profitably contemplate this admixture and display in the various and wonderful steps of the divine government over mankind, through the different periods of time, in the different dispensations of revealed religion, it will be proper to make two remarks. First, every exercise of divine *Equity* towards mankind, on the present plan, presupposes a display of grace for its basis. Even in the pristine state of perfect rectitude, the exercise of *Equity* presupposed not only the favour of existence, but also the grace of preservation to

the moment of actual defect. And still more obviously its exercise towards men as imperfect, presupposes divine forbearance, and overtures of mercy, with different degrees of plainness, according to the dispensations under which they live. No person, on the present plan, will be condemned for mere breach of law unconnected with forbearing mercy, and with intimations more or less explicit of a sovereign Benefactor as well as an equitable Governor. Hence the awful glories of a future final judgment!

Secondly, On the present plan of moral government, there is no situation in life, nor any degree of advancement in the divine favour, which excludes the exercise of holy fear and of studious diligence in the way of duty. For the best of men, and the most highly favoured, if they look to strict Equity, or to what they may claim as their just due from the supreme Governor, have cause to dread the consequence; because, every moment, they are endangered when they ‘lean to their own understanding,’ or trust their own hearts. Their whole safety consists in the favour of God, communion with him, according to his own appointment, and humble dependence upon his constant aids.—In brief, while there is the exercise of Equity in God, there is just cause for man to fear; and while there is with him



the exercise of Sovereign Grace, there is a foundation for hope. While the day of grace, or the dispensation of mercy, continues, to despair is rebellious ingratitude; and while God is an equitable Governor, to discard holy fear and humble diffidence, is dangerous presumption. Hence the propriety of addressing the chief of saints in such language as this, — ‘ Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;’ and of exhibiting to the trembling sinner an encouraging ground of pardon and salvation. Thus the displays of Equity and Mercy with God, compared with the impotency and present degeneracy of man, are wonderfully adapted to answer the ends of moral government.

We now proceed to enquire in what manner the divine Governor conducted himself towards mankind after the fall of Adam. After this event, no human being had any claim upon God, either to restore that spiritual life of holiness and happiness which was now lost, and which is the well-being of the immortal soul, or to suspend the consequence of immediate and permanent suffering which was deserved by wilful disobedience. Nevertheless, God was pleased in sovereign mercy to announce to our apostate first parents the MEANS of salvation through a Mediator, though in an indirect way.

Their deep sense of guilt and shame rendered this promissory intimation peculiarly seasonable :  
' And the Lord said unto the serpent—I will  
' put enmity between thee and the woman, and  
' between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise  
' thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.' As  
if he had said, Though I send forth the man  
from the garden of Eden, for his transgression,  
to till the ground from whence he was taken, I  
will not leave him without hope of recovered  
happiness, notwithstanding thy satanic design.  
The woman shall have a descendant, who shall  
prove a mighty deliverer from sin and misery,  
though he accomplish it in the way of suffer-  
ing.—The glorious truth, the mediatorial nature,  
and the vast importance of this promise, must  
have been daily corroborated by the institution  
of worship and sacrifice, by the expressed appro-  
bation of services, by the experienced pleasures  
of devotion and religious obedience, and by  
occasional visible or audible manifestations of  
the divine presence and glory.

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, not only  
' walked with God' in faith and hope, humility  
and love, crediting his promise and obeying his  
commands, but was an eminent *prophet* in his  
day. He was instructed to foretel clearly the  
final judgment, with the different destinies of  
saints and sinners. ' Behold,' said he, ' the Lord

‘ cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to  
 ‘ execute judgment upon all, and to convince all  
 ‘ that are ungodly among them of all their  
 ‘ ungodly deeds which they have ungodly com-  
 ‘ mitted, and of all their hard speeches which  
 ‘ ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’  
 To the great mass of mankind at that period,  
 this was a seasonable warning, declaring that  
 the supreme Governor was awfully just, as well  
 as merciful. After this highly favoured subject  
 had lived a holy life, and had faithfully exhorted  
 his contemporaries on the most important sub-  
 jects, for about three hundred years, he was taken  
 to glory in a miraculous manner; which fact  
 was a standing monument of *mercy* to that and  
 every succeeding age. For, it should be ob-  
 served, whatever recorded displays of grace and  
 mercy were made to these patriarchs, they were  
 intended for universal benefit,

Of Noah it is expressly said that ‘ he found  
 ‘ GRACE in the eyes of the Lord.’ God shewed  
 him *favour* above all the other inhabitants of  
 the world, by which he became ‘ a preacher of  
 ‘ righteousness.’ He was a happy exception  
 from the darkness and depravity of the age in  
 which he lived, and of the awful doom that  
 followed. ‘ And the Lord said unto Noah, Come  
 ‘ thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee  
 ‘ have I seen righteous before me in this genera-

‘tion.’ After justice had cleared the earth of its rebellious inhabitants by the deluge, God’s manifestation of peculiar favour to Noah and his family becomes, in effect, the origin of a new dispensation. And, as the institution of sacrifices was a sign and seal of the former dispensation of mercy, so now, the covenant being renewed, an additional seal is appended. ‘And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I *establish* my covenant with you, and with your seed after you. And God said, This is the token of the covenant—I do set my bow in the cloud.’ I have had occasion elsewhere to remark on this passage, ‘That the covenant or divine charter given to Noah, *included* the preceding; it was the *same covenant* with additional grants. Lest Noah should infer that the drowning of the world in wrath *disannulled* the well known covenant, God dissipates his fears, by saying, I will *establish* my covenant.’\* No former exhibition of mercy, or any preceptive appointment, was repealed, but each was confirmed and augmented.

When we come to the time of Abraham, the language of GRACE becomes more decisive, conspicuous, and rich. ‘I will make of thee,’ says God, ‘a great nation, and I will bless thee, and

\* Antip. Exam. vol. i. p. 238.

‘make thy name great; and thou shalt be a  
 ‘blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee,  
 and curse him that curseth thee: (i. e. my *favour*  
 shall attend those who approve of thy religion,  
 and my *justice* shall oppose those who reject it,)  
 ‘and in thee shall all families (or tribes) of the  
 ‘earth be blessed.—After these things the word  
 ‘of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision,  
 ‘saying, Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and  
 ‘thy exceeding great reward. And when Abram  
 ‘was ninety years old and nine, the Lord ap-  
 ‘peared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the  
 ‘Almighty God; walk before me and be thou  
 ‘perfect. I will *establish* my covenant with thee  
 ‘and thy seed after thee, in their generations,  
 ‘for an *everlasting covenant*, to be a God unto  
 ‘thee, and to thy seed after thee.—And God  
 ‘said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my cove-  
 ‘nant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee  
 ‘in their generations.’ On the discoveries thus  
 made to Abraham, St. Paul’s observation is very  
 remarkable: ‘The scripture foreseeing that God  
 ‘would justify the heathen through faith,  
 ‘preached before the *gospel* unto Abraham,  
 ‘saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed;’  
 implying, that salvation was by *grace* to him as  
 well as to the Gentiles.

The Apostle’s illustration of the Abrahamic  
 dispensation of grace, and the strain of his



reasoning upon it, deserve our careful attention ; but because what he advances on the subject is of considerable length, I refer to the passages at the bottom of the page.\* On this dispensation itself, however, aided by St. Paul's comment, I shall offer a few observations. First, What in the original grant is called a *covenant*, is by the Apostle termed a *promise*. ' If the inheritance ' be of the law, it is no more of promise ; but ' God gave it to Abraham by promise.' It was not properly a *contract*, but a *grant* of privileges to the unworthy. Its existence did not depend on Abraham's acceptance of terms, any more than that of the gospel depends on our manner of hearing it. No *law* was adequate to effect the recovery of fallen sinners ; for ' if there had been ' a law given which could have given life, verily ' righteousness should have been by the law.' The apostle elsewhere observes, that the law is become ' weak through the flesh,' that is, the impotence of the law to make us righteous arises from *our defect*. Grant it a subject free from defect, (as Jesus Christ was,) and it is no longer weak. To enjoin good precepts, to multiply their number, to shew their excellency and reasonableness, and to enforce them with the most awful and tremendous threatenings in case of disobedience,—all such acts

\* Gal. iii. 6—22. Rom. iv. 9—25. Heb. vi. 13—18.

are utterly unable of themselves to effect our salvation, on account of our moral impotency. Therefore ‘ what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending ‘ his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, ‘ and for sin, (i. e. a sin-offering) condemned ‘ sin in the flesh.’ Hence ‘ the scripture hath ‘ concluded all under sin, that the *promise* by ‘ faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them ‘ that *believe*.’

Secondly, As every rational being is accountable for the use he makes of promises, as well as of all other moral means, God reminds Abraham of what was *required* of him in return: ‘ Walk ‘ before me and be thou perfect.’ As if he had said, If I have revealed to thee my designs of mercy, which are also to be extended to all nations in future ages; if I exhibit to thee a ground of pardon and acceptance, see that thou receive it for thy safety and comfort, and improve it for the purpose of universal obedience. And thus the prophet Micah, many ages after: ‘ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is *good*; ‘ and what doth the Lord *require* of thee, but to ‘ do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly ‘ with thy God?’ As the foundation of acceptable obedience, God ‘ shews man what is good’—that mercy, pardon, righteousness, and felicity which he needs—and then points out his equitable

demands; justice, mercy, and a humble dependence upon God. When he says to Abraham, 'Be thou perfect,' he intends that his conduct before or with God should be upright, sincere, or without any allowed sin.

Thirdly, This covenant, or promise, in its external exhibition, belonged not only to Abraham, but also to his descendants; and not only to these, but also to the Gentiles, as a ground of faith. 'In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'—'That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ.'—'That he might be the father of all them that believe.' The appointed mode of receiving the blessings exhibited in the promise is by believing. 'They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.'—'The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.' A mere *law*, instead of affording relief to its transgressors, can only condemn them as guilty, and bind them over to suffering; but 'the gift of God is eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' The great business of a believer, the righteous man, is 'to live by faith,' which was never designed to preclude obedience; nor can that faith be genuine which is not operative. 'Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being

‘alone.’—‘Was not Abraham our father justified,  
 ‘(i. e. *declared* to be righteous and obedient) by  
 ‘works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon  
 ‘the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with  
 ‘his works, and by works was faith made  
 ‘perfect.’ The gift of righteousness is no less  
 conducive to holy obedience, than it is to hap-  
 piness. Faith, as a principle, is the spiritual life  
 of the soul, and holy obedience its health; the  
 former is the prolific root, the latter the fruit;  
 the one is the foundation of personal religion,  
 the other the corresponding superstructure.

Fourthly, The substance, the end, and the  
 glory of this promise, is Jesus Christ. ‘Now  
 ‘to Abraham and his seed were the promises  
 ‘made; he saith not, and to seeds, as of many,  
 ‘but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.’  
 —‘All the promises of God in him are yea, and in  
 ‘him amen, unto the glory of God.’—Were it not  
 for Christ, ‘the seed of the woman,’ and who is  
 emphatically ‘the seed of Abraham,’ we should  
 never have heard of any other seed being fa-  
 voured with divine, federal privileges. All  
 others are noticed and blessed *for his sake* who  
 is the end of the promises, and of the law and  
 the prophets; for, as all the patriarchal pro-  
 mises referred to him as their completion, so  
 all the sacrifices and ceremonial observances  
 were only ‘a shadow of things to come; but

‘ the body (that is, the substance) is of Christ.’ In short, promises without Christ, would be as insignificant and unprolific as planetary orbs without their central sun.

Fifthly, The promise made to Abraham is of an immutable nature, so that no precept, either moral or positive, can disannul it. ‘ And this I say, that the covenant (or, the Abrahamic promise) that was confirmed before of God, in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.’— ‘ God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.’ The subject of the oath is the immutability of the divine counsel in giving the promise, or in making an overture of righteousness and acceptance to the objects addressed. The primary proposal is to sinners, whether Jews or Gentiles; and whether they believingly receive and improve it or not, he continues immutable in his gracious offer. ‘ If we believe not, he abideth faithful.’ No unbelief on the sinner’s part can ‘ make the faith (i. e. the immutable *faithfulness*) of God of no effect.’ What a glorious display does this afford of the divine Government!

Finally, To all believers God’s promise affords



the strongest ground of consolation conceivable. 'That by two immutable things, in which it was 'impossible for God to lie, we might have a 'strong consolation who have fled for refuge to 'lay hold upon the hope set before us.' Knowing our infirmities, and that unbelief is a 'sin 'that easily besets us,' Jehovah, in addition to his promise, 'swears by himself;' and thus, as it were, pledges his own blessed Being for the truth and stability of what he says. How well adapted is this wonderfully glorious conduct of the Promiser to put an end to all unbelieving, ungrateful, and disobedient strife in our minds! He proposes, in the promise to a ruined sinner, accompanied with the highest possible assurance, his readiness to bless him, on terms inexpressibly advantageous; to bestow upon him pardon and peace, righteousness and life, Christ and himself, grace and glory. What Equity and Mercy reign here! 'He that believeth shall be saved, but 'he that believeth not shall be damned.'—'How 'shall we escape if we neglect so great salva- 'tion?'

## SECT. II.

*Of Moral Government as it respects the Mosaic and Christian Dispensations.*

WITHOUT disannulling the former promises, God gave by Moses to the Hebrews a number of laws, both moral and positive, digested into one body, which may be called the Mosaic Covenant. After a solemn preparation,\* its *formula*, or the comprehensive *constitution* of the Theocracy, is rehearsed by Jehovah himself, in ten sections, commonly called the ten commands.† To this was annexed a large assemblage of positive laws and ceremonial rites, occasionally intermixed with merciful grants, conditional promises, moral precepts, and awful sanctions. Much light is cast on this federal dispensation by the prophet Jeremiah‡ and the apostle Paul;|| and from what they say, in connexion with the Mosaic account, we may form a pretty accurate notion of its nature and design.

I. It was an act of sovereign *favour* in God to take the people into covenant at all. ‘Thus

\* Exod. xix. 3—9.

† Exod. xx. 3—17.

‡ Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

|| Heb. viii. 6—13. ix. 1, 2.

‘ shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell  
 ‘ the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I  
 ‘ did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on  
 ‘ eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.  
 ‘ Now therefore if you will obey my voice  
 ‘ indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be  
 ‘ a peculiar treasure unto me above all people:  
 ‘ for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto  
 ‘ me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.’  
 It is obvious on the face of their history, that  
 there was no antecedent excellency in this  
 people, as God himself often reminded them, to  
 deserve a selection from among other people for  
 the participation of such privileges; nor does  
 there appear in former promises any ground of  
 obligation on the part of God, that he should  
 enter into this covenant with Israel: it remains,  
 therefore, that it was done in pursuance of  
 his mere sovereign grace and infinitely wise  
 purpose.

II. This transaction, however, had in it more  
 of the nature of a *strict covenant*, than what had  
 been so termed in any preceding period between  
 God and men. It was, perhaps, more so than any  
 event recorded in scripture; for all the subse-  
 quent federal solemnities were either ratifications  
 of this, or merely subservient and explanatory.  
 ‘ These are the words thou shalt speak unto the  
 ‘ children of Israel. And Moses came and called

‘ for the elders of the people, and laid before  
‘ their faces all these words which the Lord  
‘ commanded him. And all the people answered  
‘ together, and said, All that the Lord hath  
‘ spoken we will do. And Moses returned the  
‘ words of the people unto the Lord.’ Here we  
see a gracious *proposal* on the part of the Supreme  
Governor; the people’s public and explicit  
*acceptance* of the terms proposed; and an *avowal*  
of that acceptance,—which are the essential parts  
of a strictly federal transaction. Nor can any  
thing be imagined, except the concluding scene  
of human probation, more tremendously awful  
than the ushering in of this covenant. ‘ And it  
‘ came to pass on the third day in the morning,  
‘ that there were thunders and lightnings, and a  
‘ thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of  
‘ the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the  
‘ people that was in the camp trembled.—And  
‘ Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the  
‘ Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke  
‘ thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace,  
‘ and the whole mount quaked greatly. And  
‘ when the voice of the trumpet sounded  
‘ long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses  
‘ spake, and God answered him by a voice.’  
What an awful emblem of the *Justice* of the  
Supreme Governor.

III. This covenant contains, by implication,

a rich exhibition of sovereign *grace*. ‘I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.’ When the people saw, heard, and felt the tremendous tokens of divine majesty and justice, they said unto Moses, ‘Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die;’ then he said, ‘Fear not.’ What could be more graciously encouraging than this concise reply added to the introductory declaration, ‘I am the Lord thy God!’ And what could be better calculated, in connexion with the whole solemnity, to impress them with a proper sense of the divine majesty and justice, and to deter them from disobedience, than the concluding expressions, ‘God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.’

IV. Majestic and venerable as this covenant was, it was not intended to continue always; but after a limited period it was to give place to a new and permanent covenant. ‘Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. In that he saith, A NEW



‘covenant, he hath made the first old. Now ‘that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready ‘to vanish away.’ It was not, however, to be removed with sudden violence, but by suitable degrees, with dignity and ease, and by the same divine hand that formed it; just as the light of the moon and stars gradually vanishes at the approach of the rising sun. Though a large proportion of this covenant included things of a positive and therefore variable nature, yet other parts of it were of moral and perpetual obligation. When the Mosaic structure was taken down, the Christian temple was erected. The former building, as a whole, was demolished, but the materials which were in their own nature durable or incapable of decay, were adopted for a new fabric. For example, did the Mosaic code contain the requisition of loving God and man? This was not left to perish with ‘beggarly ‘elements,’ or to vanish with typical shadows; but was transferred to the new erection; ‘the ‘house of the living God,’ which is never to be exchanged for another temporal edifice. Thus a code of laws, belonging to a former dynasty, including the constitution itself, may, as a whole, be repealed or disannulled; and yet many parts of the ancient code may be adopted under the new dynasty, associated with other laws and sanctions, and placed in different relations.

V. Hence the Mosaic dispensation was evidently of a *preparatory* nature. On this idea is founded St. Paul's remark: 'Before faith came, 'we were kept *under the law*, shut up unto the 'faith which should afterwards be revealed. 'Wherefore *the law was our schoolmaster* to bring 'us unto Christ, that we might be justified by 'faith. But after that faith is come we are no 'longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all 'the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.\*' By 'the law' here he means, indisputably, the system of Moses *as a whole*; and it is of importance to observe, that in the apostolic writings where 'the law' is mentioned, the 'ten commands' exclusively are seldom intended, but most commonly the Mosaic law, as a covenant, of which the decalogue was the constitutional basis: And the judicious enquirer will find that this is always its import when any reference is made to its removal, or abolition. It is, indeed, impossible in the nature of things that the moral law, as before explained, should be disannulled with respect to man in any state of his existence; therefore, when the scripture asserts that 'after 'faith is come, we are no longer under a school-'master,' that is, the *law*, it follows irrefragably, that we are not to understand by it the *moral* law, as the standard of rectitude and obligation.

\* Gal. iii. 23—26.

According to Jeremiah and St. Paul, the GOSPEL is called a *Covenant*, as well as the preceding dispensations. ‘But this shall be the ‘covenant that I will make with the house of ‘Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will ‘put my law in their inward parts, and write it ‘in their hearts.’\*—‘But now hath he obtained ‘a more excellent ministry, by how much also ‘he is the Mediator of a better covenant.—In ‘that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made ‘the first old.’† Though the gospel, strictly so called, is more properly a *Testament* than a *Covenant*, yet seeing this testamentary grant must necessarily imply our obligation of acceptance and corresponding duties—many of which duties are frequently specified, and sometimes enjoined on pain of God’s highest displeasure—there is also a propriety in calling the whole of the New Testament ‘a Covenant.’ Here we may behold *Mercy* and *Justice* in their brightest glories. The distinguishing character of the *Gospel* covenant, compared with all former dispensations, may be thus represented:

First, The Gospel, as to its *nature*, is the same with all the preceding exhibitions of *mercy* to sinful men, and differs only in the amplitude and clearness with which it is revealed. It contains

\* Jer. xxxi. 33.      † Heb. viii. 6, 13.

the promises in maturity; points out, and identifies their foundation, the Messiah, by numberless adamantine proofs; and shews their ultimate tendency in the brightness of meridian day. The promise to our first parents was the green blade, but the gospel, as revealed in the New Testament, is the full corn in the ear; the former was the morning star, the latter is the rising sun. In its peculiar nature, it is essentially different from any *law* whatever; yet, as these 'glad tidings' are made to men as free and accountable, it is manifest that none can reject them and be innocent. This is beautifully illustrated by the parable of the great supper.\* The gospel contains a proposal to guilty, ruined, helpless man, of every desirable good—reconciliation, pardon, and eternal life—hence arise *obligations* on those who live in this open day, more clear, more extensive, and more forcible than all others. Well may we exclaim, 'Blessed is the people who *know* the 'joyful sound!' Happy are they who *build* upon this rock!

Secondly, The Christian covenant is pre-eminently distinguished from all preceding ones, and especially from the Mosaic, by the clearness of *everlasting* sanctions, to the exclusion of

\* Luke xiv. 16—24.

temporal penalties. The former dispensations abound with temporal promises,—a numerous offspring, external peace and plenty, and the like—to the obedient; while the latter directs almost the whole of our expectations to a *future* state, a kingdom of celestial glory. The Mosaic code threatens the refractory with all that is terrible to human feelings in this life,—pestilence and famine, captivity and servitude, wars and devastations, to which we may add the punishments annexed to the violation of certain positive precepts;—but the New Testament refers the unbelieving and disobedient to the sufferings of another life, ‘where the fire is ‘never quenched’ and ‘where their worm never ‘dieth;’ where the unprofitable servant is confined to ‘outer darkness,’ and where all who obey not its calls and mandates are ‘punished ‘with everlasting destruction from the presence ‘of the Lord and from the glory of his power.’—In this very striking difference there appears profound wisdom; for one grand design of the theocracy of the Jews was to keep them together as a *distinct people*, until the coming of the Messiah. Hence a selected country, positive laws; temporal sanctions, inspired prophets, &c. all combining to preserve them as a connected body; but when the Messiah came the ‘middle ‘wall of partition’ was taken down. A separate government, and consequently temporal



sanctions, as well as typical shadows, were of no farther use.

Thirdly, The Christian covenant differs from the legal, in that it has not only an incomparably superior Mediator, but also a *Surety*. Moses was faithful as a servant in God's household, but Jesus as a Son, whose house the church is,—of his forming, and his peculiar property. Moses was also a Mediator in an inferior sense, but not a *Surety*; whereas Jesus is not only 'the (μεσίτης) *Mediator* of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises,' but also 'the (εγγυος) *Surety* of a better testament.' The mediation of Moses was only typical and ceremonial, but that of Jesus Christ is real and efficacious with respect to spiritual life and salvation, and all our concerns with God as our moral Governor. Not only would Moses have acted a most presumptuous part if he had undertaken to be the *surety* of the Israelites, as to their moral obedience and spiritual welfare; but, being their equal, he was naturally incapable of the office, and therefore could not have pretended to exercise it without the greatest absurdity. This office, the highest in the universe, could be exercised only by him who can engage, that all for whom he undertakes shall be made *willing* to receive the covenant in its full import, and be *obedient* unto the close of their proba-

tionary state; who can ‘*quicken* whom he will,’ and be to them a perpetual source of life and happiness; who can say with truth, ‘I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands.’

Fourthly, The Christian covenant is, in a peculiar manner, ‘the ministration of the Spirit,’ and therefore far more glorious than any which preceded it. ‘If the ministration of death written and engraven in stones was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious.’\* Not only the subjects of the Holy Spirit’s influence are more numerous, but the degree of that influence is more abundant in the Christian church, than in any former period. ‘After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;—and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me.’ Here it is implied, that the means of knowledge should be more general, and that divine influence should

\* 2 Cor. iii. 7, 8, &c.

be more copiously imparted under this dispensation, so as effectually to change the ‘ hearts ’ or natures of men. Again, ‘ This is that which ‘ was spoken by the prophet Joel, And it shall ‘ come to pass in the last days, saith God, I ‘ will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.’\*

All holy characters, from the beginning of the world, have been partakers of the purifying operations of the Holy Spirit; but under the Christian economy this privilege is incomparably more frequent among men, whereby every divine law resides ‘ in their inward parts,’ as if written ‘ in their hearts,’ maintaining an authoritative and lovely influence. Without this transforming influence, indeed, under whatever external dispensation, every person may be termed ‘ a natural man,’ and his mind a ‘ carnal ’ mind, which is not subject to the holy law of God; but when a man is ‘ renewed in the spirit ‘ of his mind ’ he begins to *delight* in the rectitude, purity, and perfection of the law. He sincerely and habitually *loves* what he does not expect perfectly to *equal*, while in the present state, by a commensurate conformity. In short, when we consider the united testimonies of the prophets, of John the baptist, of our Lord himself, and of his apostles, we have great reason

\* Acts ii. 16, 17.

to conclude, that God's gracious power is exerted upon a greater number of individuals, and to a greater degree, in the Christian church, than under any former dispensation of grace; and this is verified by facts in those Christian communities which are not under the darkening and benumbing influence of antiscriptural principles.

From this detail, I hope it appears to the reader, that in each divine dispensation *Sovereign Mercy* lays the foundation, *Equity* presides to deter from unhallowed abuses, and efficacious grace raises the holy superstructure;—and when the top-stone, the last of the building, is placed upon it, there will be abundant cause for a triumphant shout of ‘grace, grace unto it’—the beginning, the progress, and the end of this ‘habitation of God’ was of GRACE in a manner wonderfully consistent with *equitable Government*.

## CHAP. V.

OF MORAL GOVERNMENT AS IT RELATES TO THE ASPECT,  
DESIGN, AND CLAIMS OF THE GOSPEL; AND TO THE  
RULE, OBJECTS, PROCESS, AND CONSEQUENCES OF  
THE FINAL JUDGMENT.

### SECT. I.

*Of Moral Government as it relates to the Aspect and  
Design of the Gospel.*

HAVING considered the divine Government in reference to the various Dispensations of revealed religion, we now proceed to make some remarks on the *aspect, design, and claims* of revelation, but with a special regard to the Gospel. With respect to the first of these ideas, we should carefully distinguish between the *actual* boundaries of revealed truth, as existing among men, and the gracious ASPECT of it according to the plan of moral government; since the latter may be of an extent widely different from the former. The actual privilege, in all ages, has been very partial; while its aspect, at least as to the most important part, the promise of mercy, was by no means confined. And this is analogous to the plan of providence, in which many things may be



considered as universal blessings, while the actual participation is more limited.

The divine revelations made to Adam, Enoch, and Noah, had undoubtedly a universality of aspect, because there was no expressed restriction of their promulgation to one person or people more than another; though the actual knowledge of the discovery was very confined. The first promise, for instance, was intended for the use of Cain as well as Abel, of the daughters of men as well as the sons of God, of Ham and Japheth as well as Shem. But it is easy to conceive how, through carelessness, worldly pursuits, and sensual gratifications, many persons, families and tribes, would lose the sacred deposit, though intended for their benefit. It may not, at first, be so easy to apprehend how the revelations made to Abraham and Moses had an aspect so universal. But this difficulty will vanish if we rightly consider the difference between the *instruments* by whom a revelation was to be communicated to others, and the *objects* for whom it was intended without restriction. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, and their descendants to the time of Christ, were eminent instruments for this grand purpose; but it is evident, from the encouragement that was given to proselytes, that the patriarchs and their posterity were not the exclusive objects. Had any

one of the human race stepped forward, and put in a claim of admission on the divinely appointed terms, the Jews had no right to dispute that claim; which demonstrates, that even the revelation which of all others is deemed the most restrictive, absolutely excluded no man.

There are important considerations, by which we may account for the want of universality in the actual diffusion of revealed truth among men from the time of Abraham to Messiah's advent. One of these, and the most fundamental, is the moral depravity of mankind, whereby traditional knowledge was not suitably improved for further enquiries among that people to whom God had revealed himself. They 'loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.' The traditional history of the creation and the deluge, and the revelation given to Noah, would have excited them to seek further information from the descendants of Shem and Abraham, had they not been idolatrously content with what they knew, and sensual in their affections and pursuits. The facts of a miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt under the conduct of Moses, and of the subsistence of the same people in the wilderness for a long period, could not be unknown to surrounding nations, but through culpable neglect. They were too much attached to their soil and its produce, their flocks and herds,

hunting and warlike exploits, to pay attention to any such reports.

The necessarily insulated form of a Theocracy, as a preparatory institution, is another important consideration, which ought to be taken into the account. To an impartial mind it must appear a truly amiable trait of moral government, that early predictions of a Saviour were given for the ground of faith and hope; and the more particular these predictions were, the more valuable they must have been. But how could their truth in identifying the person intended, be ascertained so completely, for the conviction of future generations throughout the world, except the Israelites had been preserved as a distinct people? And how admirable was the wisdom of those laws and regulations which effected this, in consistency with human freedom, notwithstanding the ignorance, the levity, the fickleness and the folly of the human heart? Hence also the prohibitions of intermarriages with strangers, all the positive rites, the temporal promises and penal sanctions of the theocratical government. By not mixing with other nations, (against which there were severe penalties) their genealogies were kept exact, whereby the predictions concerning the Messiah—as one who should spring from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; from the tribe of Judah, and the family of David; and who

should be born at Bethlehem—might be easily traced. This distinct relation and specific character of prophecies respecting the Saviour, his lineage, the place of his nativity, the time of his appearing, and the reception that would be given to him, must constitute a glorious part of the *evidences* of Christianity, and must appear to unprejudiced minds, in every succeeding age, as a plan worthy of an infinitely wise moral Governor.

That the GOSPEL presents a universal aspect to all nations is plain to the most common observer. Though John the baptist confined his ministrations to the Jews, being commissioned to call them, as the subjects of the Mosaic dispensation—and to whom as included in Abraham, primarily and most directly the promises were made—to the exercise of repentance and a thankful reception of the Messiah; and though Christ himself, for similar reasons, went only to ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel;’ yet, when he had finished his work of humiliation, and ‘brought in an everlasting righteousness,’ he uttered different language from what he had done before. ‘And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach (or disciple) *all nations*;’ or, as St. Mark expresses it, ‘Go ye into *all the world*, and

‘preach the gospel to *every creature*.’—For a time, Peter hesitated with respect to the universality of this commission; but he was at length convinced, that the gospel looked upon *every* man. ‘God hath shewed me that I should not ‘call *any* man common or unclean.’\* Accordingly, the apostles and disciples went forth in all directions, making no difference between Jew and Gentile, Greek and Barbarian, bond and free, ‘preaching peace by Jesus Christ as Lord ‘of all.’ They began, indeed, at Jerusalem, and commenced their labours in the synagogues wherever they went, because among the Jews were ‘the oracles of God,’ to them were given the promises, and from them, ‘according to the ‘flesh,’ Christ came; hence, for a time, this order was observed,—‘to the Jew first, and also to ‘the Greek.’

It is, however, a painful fact, that many nations are unacquainted with the gospel. But this is not to be imputed to any divine *restriction*, or *prohibition* given to men; but to their criminal neglect, in not acting according to the letter and spirit of the commission. Nor can any one who has opportunity of knowing that commission, and has it in his power to propagate the gospel, remain innocent, in not promoting its

\* See Acts x. throughout.



more extensive spread. As for those who *hinder* its diffusion, they act in hostile defiance of the Supreme Governor, they trample on the authority of the Prince of life;—to stand before his tribunal, and to receive his judicial sentence, let them prepare. ‘Behold, ye despisers, and wonder  
‘and perish.’—‘Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye shut up the kingdom  
‘of heaven against men: for ye neither go in  
‘yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are  
‘entering, to go in.’

From this discussion it is natural to infer, that to be *unconcerned* about the propagation of the gospel among the Heathen, the Mahometans, the Jews, and ignorant people of every name, is a crime of no small magnitude, and yet too common among those who call themselves Christians. How can such persons pray ‘thy  
‘kingdom come,’ without condemning themselves by the very petition they utter? The evidence of the truth of Christianity having been sufficiently established, God does not employ miracles for its propagation, but leaves it with the subjects of his government as a sacred deposit which they are to use, and to circulate for the benefit of others. According to his plan of moral government, it is subjected to the same issue with other providential events, still under the control of sovereign prerogative in

raising up instruments and preparing their way. And this is an argument why we should, with holy promptitude, improve every favourable opportunity that presents itself to encourage all suitable characters, to send them forth with ardent supplications, that they may diffuse ‘the sweet savour of Christ’ and the salutary streams of his gospel; and to charge them, that they communicate to others the pure doctrines and precepts of Christianity, and exemplify them in their own tempers and practice.—Ought not opulent merchants, statesmen, and sovereigns, to take this into account? The poor ‘sheep in the wilderness’ perish for want of pasture and of shepherds, while alas! countless millions of money are expended in destroying men’s lives, or are lavished on pleasures and follies, which in the end involve their votaries in disquietude, remorse, and perdition. May British influence continue no longer so criminally dormant in reference to this momentous object! And when at any time missionaries are employed for this benevolent purpose, may they be men of God, whose hearts and lives are transcripts of the gospel of peace!

This leads us to consider the *DESIGN* of God, as a moral Governor, in giving mankind a revelation of his will; or, in other words, his *Rectoral Intention*. Respecting this important

subject, there is no small difficulty in choosing *terms* which are not liable to be taken in a different sense from what is really meant. *Design*, intention, or purpose *in God*, strictly speaking, is one and undivided; yet it must be viewed as *related* to different objects,—hence we employ a plural form of expression, as designs, intentions, purposes, or decrees. The epithet ‘*rectoral*,’ in this connexion, signifies that which relates to moral government; and the present enquiry is, what is the supreme Governor’s *rectoral design* in revealing his will to men, and especially the gospel as consisting of declarations, testimonies, promises, precepts, and sanctions? The general answer is, To afford appropriate MEANS both of accountability and of salvation to all persons addressed.

First, To afford appropriate means of *accountability*, in reference to all addressed without distinction. For the gospel, which I shall now consider as including all revealed truth, is in itself the same, however diversified the characters of men to whom it comes. And men’s accountability, it is evident, arises from the *means* objectively afforded them, and not from their own inclinations or dispositions, whether good or bad. The declaration is, ‘he that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned,’ without respect of persons.

Secondly, The rectoral design is to afford appropriate means of *salvation* to the persons addressed. Salvation is proposed in the gospel on certain equitable terms to all who hear it. 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' Without a testimony there can be no believing; and without the seed of the kingdom there can be no fruit. The fountain from whence the testimony flows is divine, sovereign mercy; and the design of giving it is not only to render all *accountable* for the use or abuse of it, but also to afford the means whereby *salvation* will be actually obtained by those who have 'good and honest hearts.' Hence we conclude, that the rectoral design affords to *all alike*, by the outward call of the gospel, an *opportunity*, or a suitable, merciful and equitable inducement, of *believing*, and of complying with the invitation; and those who are the subjects of gracious influence, will actually embrace the testimony for their salvation. Those who neglect this great salvation shall not escape; and those who cordially receive it, have a 'pearl of great price,'—'the good part that shall never be taken away from them.' In them it remains as the 'incorruptible seed of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.' To them it becomes the means of faith unfeigned, evangelical repentance, saving knowledge, and holy obedience.

As this subject has an immediate relation to a judicious and faithful exercise of the Christian ministry, it is of great importance to have accurate and consistent views of its radical principles. Many have supposed, and have acted in their ministerial addresses on the supposition, that because the design, or decree of God, in *itself* considered, is but one, it has therefore only *one object*,—the salvation of those whom he predestinated to life. But this is not a fair inference, because that purpose which is radically one in God, may have many ramifications as related to divers objects. This fountain may have many streams which terminate in time, (as all successive moments and transitory events do,) beside that one great river which runs into the ocean of eternity. A due consideration of different objects and ends will explain this. Suppose, for example, the purpose of God in creating intelligent beings to be the subject of contemplation; this purpose assumes different aspects, and answers different ends, as it stands related to a variety of objects. If we regard God as the object, it ends in his own eternal glory, and therefore we may say, that his design therein was to *glorify* himself. But if we regard those intelligent beings who shall be finally happy as the objects, we may say, that their happiness was his design; and yet not the *whole* of his design, because it extends beyond them to his own glory.



Again, and which is the chief difficulty, suppose those intelligent beings who will not be happy to be the objects. It must be allowed that their existence and preservation, in themselves considered, are undeserved favours; and who can question that all the ordinate means of their happiness are of the same class? Being such, therefore, God must have purposed them. Nevertheless, beyond this point the stream of *distinguishing* mercy does not run; for his rectoral design, which is exercised in goodness, forbearance and longsuffering, is opposed by their impenitence. And now, the same divine intention, itself unchanged, finds them standing in a different relation, fixing themselves in depravity, opposition, and rebellion, the cause of which is not in God, in any sense whatever. He neither created nor imparted it, and therefore it was no object of his purpose; and indeed, being a negative principle, it is absolutely incapable of being purposed. Hence, that rectoral design which would have rendered them happy if penitent and submissive, becomes the innocent occasion of their misery. As the cause of transgression is not in the law, but merely the occasion of it; so the cause of men's misery is not from the divine purpose, but in themselves opposing it. The God of goodness, 'whose mercy endureth 'for ever,' is the happiness of the righteous, but 'a consuming fire' to the wicked. The change is not in him, 'with whom there is no variable-

‘ness,’ nor in his good purpose, but in the rebellious object. God’s decree is unchangeable as himself, but the opposing offender effects his own ruin.

Moreover, let us regard the design of God as having for its object the honour, the wisdom, and the excellency of his moral government. If he gives laws, he designs thereby to shew himself, what he really is, holy, just, and good; and if he proclaims promises, he designs to manifest the glorious fact, that he is gracious and merciful. The promulgation itself is a design accomplished. But when any reject his laws and promises, they frustrate only their own benefit. What was rectorally designed for ‘their’ good becomes, through their ungrateful abuse of it, the occasion of their death. ‘Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear,’ God’s design has not failed on his part, because it was to give them appropriate and sufficient objective means, which in their own nature and tendency were calculated to reclaim and save them.’

Once more, suppose the subject of contemplation to be the obedience unto death of the holy Saviour. This, as related to the divine character, was designed to shew the justice and mercy, the wisdom and power of God; and as related to the first sin, whereby Adam and his

descendants were exposed to condemnation, God's design by it was to remove a gulf, which would have been otherwise impassable, between his justice and fallen sinners. But if we view the same object as related to moral government, God's design appears to be, to lay a foundation by a price of infinite worth, which is objectively exhibited in the gospel, for the use and encouragement of all to whom the tidings come. This foundation laid in Zion, this refuge, this ark, is all-sufficient in itself, and declared to be so; 'wherefore also it is contained 'in the scripture, Behold I lay in Sion a chief 'corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded—but 'unto them which be disobedient, the stone 'which the builders disallowed, the same is 'made the head of the corner, and a stone of 'stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them 'who stumble at the word, being disobedient, 'whereunto also they were appointed.\* The

\* 1 Pet. ii. 6—8. 'This may refer to v. 6. where Christ 'is said to be *laid* (the same word in the Greek with that 'which is here translated by *appointed*) as a chief corner-stone, elect and precious, on whom whosoever believeth, 'shall not be confounded: the Apostle then adds, that these 'unbelievers were *appointed* (viz. in their external vocation, as 'being taken into covenant with God) to be built on Christ by 'faith, but they stumbled by their unbelief at the word of the 'gospel, and consequently at this stumbling stone. And then

obstruction in the way of justice, which requires a federal righteousness as a condition *sine qua non* of justification, is now removed. God can be just through this medium, while he justifies one who must otherwise have been condemned. And since there is neither act nor design of God, open or concealed, that implies any opposition whereby the sinner is restrained from building on this foundation, God will be clear when he judgeth. If what is in itself sufficient, and what God has proved, and represented in the gospel to be so, be not actually received for salvation, the blame attaches only to him who rejects such means and testimony.

On the other hand, suppose we view Christ crucified as related to God's elect; the design of God was not merely to remove an obstruction

‘ it is an high aggravating [of] the unbelief of the Jews, that  
 ‘ they being God’s peculiar people, should reject that salvation  
 ‘ which was sent to them, and to the first offer of which they  
 ‘ were *designed*, Acts xiii. 26, 46, 47.—The *scope* of the  
 ‘ Apostle in this whole verse seems to be, to keep weak Chris-  
 ‘ tians from being offended at the multitude of unbelievers, and  
 ‘ especially at their seeing Christ rejected by the Jewish rulers  
 ‘ and doctors; and this he doth by pointing them to the scrip-  
 ‘ ture, where all this was long since *foretold*, and therefore  
 ‘ not to be wondered at now, nor be any occasion of *offence* to  
 ‘ them. See the like, John xvi. 1, 4.’ POOLE’S Annot.  
*in loc.*

for the exercise of moral government, but also to procure for them the gift of the Holy Spirit's influence, a saving union to Christ, and life everlasting. Towards these God's intention runs parallel with their existence; the seed of the kingdom, the gospel testimony concerning Christ, falls into good and honest hearts. By this fuller design of God towards them, which contains a blessing superadded to the other, a gracious influence, holy dispositions and habits, and the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ, are communicated. Hence the spirit of repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus. This illuminating and sanctifying principle produced by the Spirit, as the effect of an *efficaciously decretive* design, running parallel with that which is merely *rectoral*, enables the chosen sinner to obey the calling, and to bring forth fruit unto God; whereby he does not 'draw back unto perdition, but believes to the 'saving of the soul.'

Some have supposed, that God has a *contrary design* respecting the non-elect, whereby he reprobates, rejects, or secretly frustrates the sinner's efforts to come to Christ for salvation; but the abettors of this opinion, we may safely conclude, 'know not what they say, nor whereof 'they affirm.' If indeed it could be proved that God has such a reprobating decree, then a



general call to sinners to repent, and believe in Christ for salvation, would be tantalizing and delusive. But God *does* call sinners to repent and believe, as every part of the New Testament shews; therefore, on the principle here resisted, one decree would *oppose* another, which is absurd. Whatever the all-wise God effects is an index of his decree concerning it; he does call and command 'all men every where to 'repent;' therefore he decreed to do it. But surely he does not *effect* the blindness, impenitence, unbelief and hatred of men, of which the cause is exclusively in themselves; and consequently there is no divine *purpose* to produce them.

From this discussion we may clearly perceive an important difference between the *rectoral* design of God, as founded in the nature of moral government, and his *sovereign* design, founded on his prerogative, to communicate the influences of his Holy Spirit to ensure compliance. The former shews what *ought* to be done by the the subject of moral government; the latter shews what the sovereign Benefactor *will* do additionally. The one secures our *obligation* to believe and obey; the other our *actual* belief and obedience. In brief, the one is a *revelation*, addressed to the understanding and will of the subject; the other is an operation in the heart

effecting a compliance. Indeed, the *rectoral* design denotes a decree as far as it goes, for God's *will* is in it; and without its exercise there could be no foundation for moral government. There is its termination fixed; beyond this it does not extend, and this it completely answers both 'in them that are saved, and in 'them that perish.' The other may be termed *sovereign*, or sovereignly decreative, because it is the exercise of mere good pleasure, or is the design of a Benefactor, which proceeds beyond what moral government, abstractedly considered, can require. The existence of the former is founded in the relation of governor and governed; objective grace and equity on the part of God, and a natural capacity with freedom of choice on the part of man. In a word, the one design ends with the reasons of moral government; the other ends with the reasons of mere sovereign pleasure administered with wisdom.

It further appears that the *rectoral* intention, as to its *moral tendency*, is to render accountable creatures obedient and happy; so that nothing prevents this result but their own abused liberty. When mercies are most freely and unreservedly offered to man, and the most equitable laws enacted, and both, as to their moral tendency, to render the subject happy by obedience; we must conclude, that in every instance where

this *tendency* is frustrated, the cause is exclusively in man himself. Though no design of God, strictly speaking, is frustrated, yet the *moral aptitude* of the rectoral design is as liable to be so, when a suitableness of disposition is not found in the subject, as he is liable to abuse his freedom. Where the understanding is dark, and the heart depraved, the most unbounded benevolence, the most gracious promises, the wisest laws, and the most astonishing mercies, objectively proposed, as they are in the gospel, are frustrated as to their genuine tendency.

When God convened the thousands of Israel at the foot of mount Sinai, and with the majesty of Godhead pronounced the ten commands, forbidding idolatry and other sins, was it not the genuine *moral tendency* of his legislative and *rectoral intention*, to render the people to whom they were addressed, without exception, *obedient* to those laws, and, by a collateral use of the preceding promises, *happy* in complying? Yet, what was the result? Did this benevolent and equitable design of the Supreme Governor actually preserve them all from idolatry, irreverence, violation of the sabbath, disobedience to parents, murder, adultery, theft, false testimony, and covetousness? Historical evidence decides in the negative. Some, indeed, feared, believed, loved, and obeyed. But who made

them to differ from the others? Can there be any assignable cause beside the operation of the Holy Spirit in pursuance of a *sovereign* purpose?

Then only do the rectoral and sovereignly decretive intentions successfully coincide and harmonize in the subject, when he is actually conformed to the rule of moral government. When he uses and improves his capacities and opportunities to the divine glory, when he conforms to the rule of right announced to him, when he is duly grateful and thankful for mercies bestowed, when he receives and improves exhibited favours; *then* he may be said to be conformed to the rectoral intention, while this effect must be ascribed to a sovereign design and operation in his heart. ‘Thy people shall be willing in the day of my power.’ ‘He worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.’ The rectoral design is replete with benevolence, which appears from the variety, suitableness, and wonderfully engaging nature of the *means* employed to promote the subject’s happiness; if the event, therefore, prove disastrous to him, these are not the cause (much less any secret frustrating decree) but the innocent occasion of his fault and condemnation. This result is to be ascribed, not to the want of benevolence in the Governor, but to the sinfulness of the subject, whereby the

genuine aptitude of the rectoral design is counteracted. In short, whenever the moral tendency of the rectoral design is frustrated or counteracted, it is owing to the *sinful defect* of man; and whenever the event is obedience and happiness, it is owing to the *sovereign influence* of God.



## SECT. II.

*Of Moral Government as it relates to the Claims of the Gospel, and the Obligations of Sinners to believe it.*

HAVING considered the Aspect and Design of Revelation, and especially the gospel, we now proceed to a few remarks, in a more direct way, on its CLAIMS; or, the *Obligations* of men to receive the gospel and all the blessings it exhibits. The gospel finds all men *sinners*, condemned and perishing, morally impotent, inclined to evil, and hopeless; if, therefore, it addresses men at all, it must address them in that character. The evangelical testimony is an *absolute grant* from the moral Governor to the unworthy, the needy, and the ruined; it denotes ‘good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people,’ and not *good* people exclusively, who are qualified by grace to improve it. The *warrant* to believe unto righteousness and salvation, is not a moral or spiritual qualification in the subject, but the testimony of God concerning his Son. A *warrant* from God to believe in Christ, or to receive him and all his benefits, is a totally different consideration from a *moral fitness*, a consciousness of need, a good desire, a teachable disposition, a holy principle, &c. Who *may* believe is one thing; who

*will* believe is another. All *may* believe, on the warrant of the moral Governor; and some *will* believe, because enabled by sovereign grace.

The gospel, considered in itself and in its tendency, is a salutary stream issuing from under the throne of God, diffusing itself wider and wider, (though, through the depravity of man, subject to occasional interruptions,) until at length it is spread among all nations, and covers the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. Its progress, however, is directed with an alternate predominance of sovereignty and equity. In that it flows to one part, rather than another, how sovereign! But in that it has no respect of persons, making no difference between external rank, or degrees of natural refinement, how equitable! No person or nation can claim it in equity; and wherever it is enjoyed, sovereign discrimination makes the difference. While none are denied, by any prohibition or decree, some are favoured beyond their demerit. Still, wherever it actually comes, its aspect and design are as free and diffusive as the light.

Yet we must say, that the contents of the gospel are peculiarly adapted to certain dispositions and circumstances. Are any made sensible of their spiritual malady? how seasonable

the information that Christ is the physician of souls! Are any burdened and heavy laden? Jesus promises freedom from useless toil and labour. Are any poor in spirit? the riches of grace and heaven itself are opened for their use. Do any hunger and thirst after righteousness? with righteousness and glory shall they be filled. Do they mourn over their own sins and those of others, the dishonour done to God, and the consequent miseries of sinners? the Saviour declares that they shall be comforted. In brief, the gospel proposes invaluable blessings suited to *every state* without exception. It even brings its righteousness near to 'the stout-hearted who are far from righteousness.' The rectoral design and the warrant are the same to all, which makes the *obligation* equal; and yet the *fact* is, that none will comply but such as are influenced by grace to feel their exigency. He who is made rich, is first made poor; he who is truly satisfied, is first made to hunger and thirst; he who enters in at the strait gate, is first made to strive for an entrance; and, finally, he who enjoys eternal rest and salvation, is first found a penitent, a believer, obedient and persevering.

The *obligation* of men to *credit* the testimony of God concerning his Son unto eternal life, and cordially to *receive* Christ as the 'unspeakable

'gift,' is not to be estimated by their moral ability, good inclination, or a well disposed mind; but by their natural capacity of understanding and will, with unrestrained freedom; and by the moral *means* held forth by the supreme Governor, as adapted in themselves, and according to their moral tendency, to do us good and make us blessed. Moral means are the grand medium whereby God governs his accountable creatures, and eminently so mankind under the gospel dispensation. If to the ignorant he affords the means of knowledge; to the guilty, pardon; to enemies, reconciliation; to the sorrowful, comfort; and to the needy, heavenly riches,—what can be more conclusive, than that such characters are under obligation to receive and improve such means according as they really suit their cases, whether they are *sensible* of that suitableness or not. The changeable feelings and sensibilities of men is too fickle and precarious a basis for moral obligation; for that basis must be something which is firm and stable, independently of the perpetually varying apprehensions and inclinations of the subject obliged. It must not be a leaden rule that will take any form which human inclination may give it. The authority of God is not to be bent and contorted by the hand of man.

Though an authoritative *exhibition* of bless-

ings really suitable to our wants strongly oblige us to compliance; yet the obligation is augmented and becomes proportionally stronger by the addition of *commands* and *threatenings*. This last circumstance belongs to every hearer of the gospel; for, first, God *commands* him to *repent*, that his sins may be blotted out,—to *awake* from the sleep of sin, that Christ may give him light,—to *believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, that he may be saved, and to *strive* to enter in at the strait gate, in order that he may walk in the narrow way that leadeth unto life. Secondly, awful *threatenings* attend a refusal. Those who refuse to come and partake of the gospel supper incur displeasure, and that displeasure is expressed by a declaration that they shall not taste of it,—those who continue impenitent, are threatened with perdition,—those who persist in unbelief, shall be condemned,—those who obey not the gospel, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence and glorious power of the Judge.

It appears to me, I own, a surprising instance of the influence of prejudice, deduced from false principles and associations, that any intelligent persons, acknowledging the New Testament to be the expression of the divine will, should scruple to confess, that Jesus Christ and all his benefits are there proposed to the



acceptance of men as sinners. Is the gospel the *primary instrument* in the conversion of sinners, or is it not? Who can hesitate to answer in the affirmative? But if so, can it address men in any other character than as *unconverted*? And if they are addressed in that character, are they not strictly *obliged* to accept of the heavenly donation? The negative of this question is confronted by every principle of moral obligation. Beside, the rejection of Christ and his great salvation, ranks with crimes the most aggravated, and involves the subject of it in the deepest guilt. ‘How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?’ He who rejects God’s testimony, ‘makes him a liar;’ and this is the record, or testimony, ‘that God hath given to us (that is, in the gospel) eternal life, and this life is in his Son.’\* If the gospel of the kingdom is commanded to be *preached* to all the world, to every creature, that is, to *all men* in all nations, for the obedience of faith; how can the consequence be evaded, that those who hear, are under indissoluble obligation to *believe* the record in its full extent?

But as the holy scriptures abound with calls, invitations, proposals, and inducements to sinners, in order that they may repent, believe, and

\* See 1 John, v. 9—13.

obey,—with awful denunciations for their want of compliance; so they abundantly testify concerning the ignorance, hardness of heart, moral impotence, and enmity of men to God, to his law, and the light of truth, while they continue in an unregenerate state. Now the question is, Are these two representations to be taken in their *full* extent, or is one of them to be *reduced* in meaning? The consistent Calvinist asserts the former; but Pelagians and Hyper-Calvinists (for they occasionally concur) plead for the latter. The Pelagians prefer an attempt to reduce the doctrine of human depravity; the Hyper-Calvinists, the extent of the gospel call. Now, it is remarkable that those respectively who hold both extremes, (which here amicably meet) attempt their plan of reduction or extenuation on the very same principle, viz. That moral ability is requisite to constitute moral obligation. It is plain, from scripture, says the Pelagian, that the gospel call is general; *therefore* all men must be possessed of moral ability to comply, which is incompatible with native depravity. But it is plain from scripture, says the Hyper-Calvinist, that men in their unregenerate state are totally depraved; *therefore* the gospel call is addressed only to those who are divinely quickened to feel their need of the gospel remedy.

The consistent Calvinist rejects both these

inferences, and admits the above statements in their full extent of meaning. The reasons are, because neither can be denied without offering great violence to the plain declarations of God's word; and, because both may be perfectly reconciled on satisfactory principles. These principles are,—the true grounds of moral obligation,—and the difference between the rectoral and the sovereign designs of God. It is demonstrable, that moral ability being requisite to constitute human obligation, is a false assumption. If any thing more be required, than a *natural* capacity, *freedom* of will, and moral *means*, innumerable absurd consequences would necessarily follow; especially this one, that the direct way to be freed from all moral obligation would be to plunge into the depth of moral depravity, and the best mode of getting rid of pursuing vengeance from God would be to blaspheme and oppose him!—That there is an important difference between the rectoral and sovereign design of God, has been shewn in the preceding pages; nor is it difficult to perceive how this difference fairly solves the seeming inconsistency. If man however depraved retains the grounds of accountability, it is evident that the *rectoral* intention in the general call of the gospel does not require, as a necessary condition for its legitimate exercise, any moral ability in the subject; while the *sovereign* intention has the

fullest scope, without any clashing or interference, in its exercise on the hearts of God's elect, whereby the call becomes effectual for their salvation.

In order that there might be a suitable, reasonable, and consistent ground of believing in Christ for salvation, we must infer, that those parts of holy writ which represent Christ as 'the Saviour of the world,' which affirm that 'he died for all,' that he is a 'propitiation for the sins of the whole world,' and that 'he gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time'—ought not to be interpreted as denoting only the elect who are eventually saved from sin and misery. What possible good end can be answered by *restricting* such expressions? The restricted interpretation is doubtless intended for the avoidance of some injurious consequence; such as that Christ would die in vain for some, or that all must be saved, &c. But these consequences do not follow, except on an assumed and false notion of the *price* of redemption and *redemption* itself denoting the same thing. These two ideas are essentially different, as related to different objects. For what is *redemption*, in accurate thought, but the *actual deliverance* of the subject from some personal evil, and in the present case, from condemnation, sin and misery? But is any person thus delivered

before he is born? And what is the *price* of redemption but a sacrifice of infinite worth presented to the holy and just moral Governor, to answer certain important ends? One of these ends is the actual redemption or deliverance of God's chosen, by the communication of the Holy Spirit, union to Christ, justification, regeneration, sanctification, and persevering grace to be crowned with glory. Another end is, to afford an adequate basis for the rectoral design of God in proposing Christ and his benefits to sinners in general when addressed by the gospel call. When we assert, therefore, that the rectoral design founded on the *price* of redemption, extends to all men—in the same sense as the original and subsequent promises, and innumerable other blessings that perpetually flow from the Father of lights—justice is done to the universal mode of expression in the scripture testimony, while it stands perfectly consistent with the sovereign designation of that price in the actual redemption of God's elect.

If, as before proved, reconciliation is exhibited in the gospel call to any who are not, and will not be reconciled; if God is *in Christ* making a proposal of 'reconciling the world ' to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto ' them;' it follows that the price of redemption has the extent above mentioned in the plan of



divine government. Again, if reconciliation to God is proposed, by the persuasions, entreaties, and affectionate importunities of his word and ambassadors, as it expressly and most evidently is, there must be a true and rational, as opposed to a fallacious and delusive *ground* of reconciliation. And what can this be but an infinite and therefore indefinite price? And if God invites to the great supper 'the poor and the maimed, the 'halt and the blind,' yea, many who 'pray to be 'excused,' and who never come, the provision must, in all consistency and propriety of meaning, have been rectorally *designed* for them, in virtue of the great sacrifice; as much designed as a feast is for one who being invited to partake of it sends a message that 'he cannot come.'

It is of importance to remark, that the *price* of redemption—the meritorious ransom, or the infinite *merit* of the Saviour—and *redemption* itself, which is actual deliverance, have different *objects*, and have their *sources* in different relations.

First, They have different *objects*. The *redemption* itself has for its objects God's *elect*, the subjects of actual deliverance. These, in due time, are called and 'redeemed from among 'men' by God the Holy Spirit 'working in them 'both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure,' who also is the Spirit of Christ. But the

*meritorious price* has for its immediate object *God*, the infinitely holy, just, and equitable Governor, to whom it is presented ; ‘ an offering and *sacrifice to God* for a sweet-smelling savour.’ It was presented for *his* acceptance, as the basis of a ministry of reconciliation to be sent among all nations, and to be addressed to every human creature ; and as the basis of actual deliverance from guilt and condemnation, from sin and misery, to all who should be effectually called. On this great sacrifice is founded God’s *rectoral* intention towards all mankind, and his *sovereign* intention towards his chosen ; he therefore is the immediate object to whom it was presented, that by virtue of it he might accomplish these two principal ends.

Secondly, They have their *sources* in different relations. These relations, as in *God*, are Equity and Sovereignty ; the price referring to the former, and redemption, which is a personal deliverance, having respect to the latter. The scheme, indeed, as a whole, originates in an infinitely wise and sovereign benevolence, but the subordinate parts have these essential distinctions. Again, these relations, as in *Christ*, are his Mediatorship and Suretiship ; the price regarding and flowing from the former, and redemption relating to and resulting from the latter. *Mediatorship* and merit are the imme-

diate source of the rectoral design and of all gospel offers; but *Suretiship* and a rightful 'power over all flesh' are the immediate spring of actual redemption. From the *Suretiship* of Christ, in virtue of his mediatorial sacrifice, flow the exertion of his power, his quickening influence, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and perseverance. Christ as a Surety is the proximate fountain of these blessings, which, according to sovereign designation, are communicated only to persons who eventually love God and enjoy heaven,—the 'chosen, the called, the 'faithful,' and the 'blessed of the Father,' according to his sovereign, unfathomable wisdom and love.

To bring this discussion to a close—every promised blessing, proposed to mankind by the moral Governor, flows through the mediation and merits of Christ; and since overtures of pardon and reconciliation are made to sinners, many of whom are eventually not pardoned and reconciled, how can the consequence be avoided, that the *provision*, in its rectoral design, must be more extensive than actual salvation? Must it not be equally so with the *overture*? And must not the advantages proposed be the purchase of the Mediator? If the overture have no other basis than the foreseen *aversion* of the sinner to the blessings proposed to him, then the import

of the proposal would be, If you believe a *falsehood*, God is willing to bestow upon you pardon and life! For how can the invitation, command, or threatening be otherwise than false and delusive, if the provision of sacrifice and merit be designed exclusively for elect sinners? How can any other have a *warrant* to believe the testimony concerning Christ crucified? On this principle, every person must know his *election* before he has any warrant to believe; or if he believe the testimony without this knowledge, he is required to believe without evidence, and to act the part of a presumptuous intruder in order to acquire it.—We conclude, therefore, first, that every man addressed by the gospel is under *obligation* to receive Christ and his benefits in virtue of the meritorious price of Redemption being rectorally designed for him as one of the human race;\* and, secondly, that the elect have no warrant beside this for believing, there being no other basis of belief for any one of mankind.

\* That illustrious reformer and admirable writer, CALVIN, has treated much of predestination and the doctrines of special grace; but though his works consist of nine volumes folio, I do not think that there is one sentence in them that militates against the above representation; and in many places he expresses himself in a manner that abundantly justifies it. The following quotations may serve as a specimen: Matt. xxvi. 28. ‘Sub multorum nomine *non partem mundi tantum* designat, sed *totum humanum genus*.—Dum ad sacram men-

The sovereign purpose of God to take away the blindness, hardness, and enmity of some, and by the operation of his Holy Spirit to create them

‘sam accedimus, non solum hæc generalis cogitatio in mentem  
 ‘veniat, *redemptum Christi sanguine esse mundum* ; sed pro  
 ‘se quisque reputet peccata sua expiata esse.’—Rom. v. 18.  
 ‘*Communem omnium gratiam facit, quia omnibus exposita*  
 ‘*est, non quod ad omnes extendatur re ipsa. Nam etsi passus*  
 ‘*est Christus pro peccatis totius mundi, atque omnibus in-*  
 ‘*differenter, Dei benignitate, offeretur ; non tamen omnes*  
 ‘*apprehendunt.*’

When CALVIN wrote his celebrated *Christian Institutes*, he was but a young man, about seven and twenty years of age, a time when it cannot be supposed that his judgment was matured on some theological points of peculiar difficulty. We may therefore naturally expect his more perfect and settled thoughts in his subsequent expositions of the holy scriptures. But what is very remarkable, his last Will, drawn up by himself in the fifty-fifth year of his age, and about one month before his death, has these expressions :  
 ‘Testor etiam ac profiteor me suppliciter ab eo petere, ut  
 ‘ita me ablutum et mundatum velit sanguine summi Re-  
 ‘demptoris, *effuso pro humani generis peccatis*, ut mihi  
 ‘liceat apud tribunal ipsius consistere sub ipsius Redemptoris  
 ‘*imagine.*’ Had it not been his design to express an important sentiment by the clause printed here in Italics, a sentiment which had been familiar to his mind, it is difficult to account for his introducing it at all on so solemn an occasion ; since the sense would have been complete without it.

A remark not very dissimilar might be made on the deservedly celebrated Dr. JOHN OWEN. When he wrote his Treatise entitled ‘*Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu,*’ he was about thirty-two years of age ; but it was in an advanced period of his life that he warmly recommended POLHILL’S



anew in Christ Jesus, is a process totally different, and proceeds from a different source. In a word, Jesus Christ, in the plan of DIVINE

Treatise on the *Divine Will*, of which he says, ‘The *argumentative* part of this book is generally suited unto the ‘genius of the age past, wherein *accuracy and strictness of reason* bare sway.’ And yet this Treatise, to which Dr. OWEN wrote a recommendatory preface, among other forcible arguments has the following: ‘If Christ did no way die for ‘all men, which way shall the truth of these general promises ‘be made out? *Whosoever will may take of the water of life.* ‘What, though Christ never bought it for him? *Whosoever ‘believes shall be saved.* What, though there were no *λυτρον*, ‘no price paid for him? Surely the gospel knows no water ‘of life but which Christ purchased, nor way of salvation but ‘by a *λυτρον*, a price paid.—If Christ *no way* died for *all* ‘men, how can those promises stand *true*? All men, if they be- ‘lieve, shall be saved; saved, but how? Shall they be saved by ‘a *λυτρον*, or price of redemption? there was none at all paid ‘for them; the *immense value* of Christ’s death doth not ‘make it a price as to them for whom he died not; or shall ‘they be saved without a *λυτρον*, or price? God’s unsatisfied ‘justice cannot suffer it, his minatory law cannot bear it, ‘neither doth the gospel know any such way of salvation; ‘take it either way, the *truth* of those promises cannot be ‘vindicated, unless we say, that Christ died for *all* men.— ‘No reprobate ever did or will believe, yet the promise must ‘be *true*, and true *antecedently* to the faith or unbelief of ‘men; *true*, because it is the promise of God, and *antecedently* ‘true, because else it could not be the object of *faith*.—I argue ‘from the *minister’s commission*, which is, Go preach the gos- ‘pel to every creature. By virtue of this, they command all ‘men every where to repent; and to induce them thereunto, ‘they open a door of hope to them, and to raise up that hope

GOVERNMENT, is the appointed ‘Saviour of all men ;’ but, in the plan of DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY, with an infallible and further *speciality* of inten-

‘they set forth Jesus Christ evidently before their eyes, as if he were crucified among them.—In all their pathetic beseechings, *God himself beseeches*, 2 Cor. v. 28. in all their loud outcries, *Wisdom herself cries out*, Prov. viii. 1, 4. in all their earnest expostulations, Christ himself *stands at the door and knocks*, Rev. iii. 20.—But if Christ *no way* died for *all men*, how came the minister’s commission to be so large? They command men to repent that their sins may be blotted out, but how can their sins be blotted out for whom Christ was not *made sin*?—Why should *they* come to that feast for whom nothing is *prepared*?—I argue from the *unbelief* of men, which is wonderfully aggravated in scripture. Great salvation is prepared, but *unbelief neglects it*, Heb. ii. 3. Eternal rest is promised, but *unbelief comes short of it*. Heb. iv. 1. The kingdom of heaven comes nigh to men, but *unbelief draws back from it*, Heb. x. 39. God himself bears witness that there is life in his Son, even for *all if they believe*, but unbelief says *No* to it, and doth what it can *to make him a liar*, 1 John v. 10.—How can those men—neglect salvation, for whom it was never prepared? How can they fall short of eternal rest, for whom it was never purchased? or draw back from the kingdom of heaven which never approached unto them? How can there be life in Christ for those for whom he never died? and if not, which way doth their *unbelief* give God the *lie*?’ POLHILL on the *Divine Will* considered in its *Eternal Decrees*, and holy Execution of them, p. 282, &c.

The great Mr. CHARNOCK, who for depth of penetration and accuracy of judgment was equalled by few, and to whom Dr. OWEN was peculiarly attached, expresses himself thus : ‘The wrath of God was so fully *appeased* by it, [the death of

tion, 'of those that believe' through gracious influence, in virtue of Christ's Suretiship as well as his merits.

' Christ] his justice so fully *satisfied*, that there is *no bar* to a readmission into his favour, and the enjoyment of the *privileges purchased* by it, but *man's unbelief*. The blood of Christ is a stream, whereof *all men* may drink; an ocean, wherein *all men* may bathe.—If any perished by the biting of the fiery serpent, it was not for want of a remedy in *God's institution*, but from wilfulness in themselves. The antitype answers to the type, and wants no more a sufficiency to procure a spiritual good, than that to effect the cure of the body. He is therefore called *the Saviour of the World*, 1 John, iv. 14.—When the apostle saith, (Rom. x. 9.) If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe with thy heart, *thou shalt be saved*; he speaks to *every man* that shall hear that sentence.—If all the men in the world were united to him by faith, there could not be any more required of Christ for their salvation than *what he hath already acted*; for it is a sacrifice of *infinite value*, and infinite knows *no limits*. Since it was sufficient to satisfy *infinite justice*, it is sufficient to save an inexpressible number, and the virtue of it in saving *one*, argues a virtue in it to save *all* upon the same condition.—If men therefore perish, it is not for want of value, or virtue, or acceptableness in this *sacrifice*, but for want of answering the terms upon which the enjoyment of the benefits of it is proposed. If a man will shut his eyes against the light of the sun, it argues an obstinacy in the person, not any defect in the sun itself.' CHARNOCK'S Discourse on the *Acceptableness of Christ's Death*.—His Discourse on *Reconciliation* is full of the same sentiment. See his Works, Vol. ii. p. 564. 170, 212, 219.

## SECT. III.

*Of Moral Government as it relates to the Rule, Objects, Process, Effects, and Consequences of the Final Judgment.*

A VARIETY of topics may suggest the probability of a future state of retribution, and of some public display of the final issue of human probation; but the Supreme Governor has not left us to mere conjecture. Strong inferences, indeed, might be drawn from the dictates of conscience, from the natural consequences of virtue and vice, from the mixture of good and evil in the present state, and from the consideration of a righteous Judge making some essential and prominent difference between the righteous and the wicked; but in his written word God has given us a clear and decisive account of a judgment to come, an account so plain, so circumstantial, and so awful, that it is difficult to conceive any thing more so. For reasons before adduced, under the Mosaic Theocracy the doctrine of rewards and punishments was in a great measure confined to temporal good and evil. It is not to be supposed, however, that the serious and attentive part of the Jews, even from the time of Enoch, or Adam, had not a traditionary knowledge of a future judgment,

as well as a future state. And this we may conclude the rather, because the patriarchs acted on this principle. Of Abraham it is expressly said, ‘For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.’\* They all ‘confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.’ And on their conduct the inspired penman observes: ‘For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly if they had been mindful of that country, from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned: but now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city.’†

However sparingly future sanctions are intimated in the Mosaic Legislation, for wise purposes to which I have before alluded, we are not to suppose that Moses himself was not acquainted with a future state. For ‘by faith Moses when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ (or, *for Christ*, the promised Messiah)

\* Heb. xi. 10.

† Vers. 14--16.



‘ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for  
 ‘ *he had respect to the recompence of reward.*’\*  
 The sacred writer, after noticing a number of  
 ancient worthies, including ‘ David, Samuel, and  
 ‘ the prophets,’ observes, ‘ and others were tor-  
 ‘ tured, not accepting deliverance, *that they*  
 ‘ *might obtain a better resurrection.*’†

Not to insist on many other passages in the  
 Old Testament where the doctrine of a future  
 judgment is decidedly implied, the following  
 may be noticed: ‘ Doth not he that pondereth  
 ‘ the heart, consider it? and he that keepeth thy  
 ‘ soul, doth not he know it? and shall he not  
 ‘ *render to every man according to his works.*’‡—  
 ‘ The Lord shall endure for ever, he hath pre-  
 ‘ pared his throne for judgment, and *he shall*  
 ‘ *judge the world in righteousness.*’§—‘ Rejoice, O  
 ‘ young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart  
 ‘ cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk  
 ‘ in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of  
 ‘ thine eyes,—but know thou, that *for all these*  
 ‘ *things God will bring thee into judgment.*’§—  
 ‘ For God shall bring every work into judgment,  
 ‘ with every secret thing, whether it be good, or  
 ‘ whether it be evil.’¶—‘ I the Lord, search the  
 ‘ heart; I try the reins, even *to give every man*

\* Heb. xi. 24—26.

† Vers. 35.

‡ Prov. xxiv. 12.

§ Psal. ix. 7, 8.

¶ Eccles. xi. 9.

¶ Eccles. xii. 14.

‘according to his ways, and according to the  
‘fruit of his doings.’\*—‘I beheld till the  
‘thrones were cast down (i. e. all terrestrial  
‘kingdoms abolished) and the ancient of days  
‘did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and  
‘the hair of his head like the pure wool; his  
‘throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels  
‘as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came  
‘forth from before him; thousand thousands  
‘ministered unto him; the judgment was set,  
‘and the books were opened.—And many of  
‘them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall  
‘awake, some to everlasting life, and some to  
‘shame and everlasting contempt. And they  
‘that be wise shall shine as the brightness of  
‘the firmament; and they that turn many to  
‘righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.’†

Is it conceivable that these and many other similar passages in the Old Testament had their meaning exhausted in reference to temporal scenes? Are they not most naturally calculated to direct the views of men to the end of life, the conclusion of time, and the awful realities of a future judgment of the righteous and the wicked? The Sadducees among the Jews, indeed, denied a judgment to come; but they also denied the existence of angels and of

\* Jer. xvii. 10. also xxxii. 19. † Dan. vii. 9, 10. xii. 2, 3.

human souls after death. And the circumstance of their being an heretical exception, is a proof of the doctrine they rejected being regarded as orthodox. Beside, the pointed manner in which they are reproved by Christ's Harbinger,\* and the view in which Christ himself regarded their doctrine, shew that they did not *understand the scriptures*.† On a certain occasion our Lord instituted an argument, even from the writings of Moses, to whose writings and legislation they professed a peculiar attachment, in proof of the doctrine of the resurrection as indisputably implied in well known phrases which they contain; and it appears from the context 'that he put 'the Sadducees to silence.'‡

So refulgent is the light of the New Testament on the doctrine of a final Judgment and the resurrection, that even the Modern Sadducees, who deny the existence of angels and human souls in a separate state, admit it into their meagre system, while they renounce almost every other doctrine peculiar to Christianity. How sublime and impressive is our Lord's description of the last judgment! 'When the 'son of man shall come in his glory, and all the 'holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon 'the throne of his glory. And before him shall

\* Matt. iii. 7. † Matt. xvi. 6—12. ‡ Matt. xxii. 23—34.

‘ be gathered all nations; and he shall separate  
 ‘ them one from another, as a shepherd divideth  
 ‘ his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the  
 ‘ sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the  
 ‘ left. Then shall the King say unto them on  
 ‘ the right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father,  
 ‘ inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the  
 ‘ foundation of the world.—Then shall he say  
 ‘ also unto them on the left hand, Depart from  
 ‘ me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared  
 ‘ for the devil and his angels.—And these shall  
 ‘ go away into everlasting punishment; but the  
 ‘ righteous into life eternal.’\* This doctrine  
 the apostles had in commission to declare: ‘ And  
 ‘ Jesus commanded us to preach unto the people,  
 ‘ and to testify that it was he which was or-  
 ‘ dained of God to be the Judge of quick and  
 ‘ dead.†’—‘ For to this end Christ both died,  
 ‘ and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord  
 ‘ both of the dead and living.—For we shall all  
 ‘ stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.’‡—  
 ‘ Wherefore we labour (or, endeavour) that  
 ‘ whether present or absent, we may be accepted  
 ‘ of him. For we must all appear before the  
 ‘ judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may  
 ‘ receive the things done in his body, according  
 ‘ to that he hath done; whether it be good or  
 ‘ bad.’||

\* Matt. xxv. 31—46.

† Acts x. 42.

‡ Rom. xiv. 9, 10.

|| 2 Cor. v. 9, 10.

From these passages of inspiration (though but few out of many), nothing need be plainer, than the appointment of a *judgment to come*. And yet, such is the perversity of the human mind, the *Sadducean* and *mystic* extremes (for extremes often meet) unite in discarding it. Some in the apostolic days, bearing the name of Christians, maintained that the resurrection had then taken place: ‘And their word will eat  
‘as doth a canker (or, gangrene); of whom is  
‘Hymeneus and Philetus; who concerning the  
‘truth have erred, saying that the resurrection  
‘is past already, and overthrow the faith of  
‘some.’\* And there are those in the present day who draw similar conclusions, substituting for arguments pretended visions. The immediate business of the present discussion is not to dispute with such men, but to enquire, What is the *rule* of the final Judgment—what are the proper *objects* of it—what is the *process*, as to the respective influence of *Equity* and *Sovereignty*—and what are the *effects*, especially the equitable consequences of all.

I. We begin with observing that the *RULE* of final judgment can be no other than that of moral government. For public judgment, from its very nature, does not *create* a law for the

\* 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.



purpose, but only tries the characters and works of men according to a law already existing, and which was the standard of obedience in a state of probation. It has been before shewn, that the rule of moral government, which may be denominated the *moral law*, has its ultimate foundation in the related characters of the Governor and the governed. Hence it is plain that obligations vary together with circumstances and relations; and that moral obligation, moral law, and constituted relations, are coexistent. There is no obligation without law, nor is there any law without constituted relation; the one resulting from the other as a necessary effect. The only possible way, therefore, of exempting us from obligation to the moral law, whether in this life or in any future period, is to destroy our existence. This law, the rule of right and wrong, will be the standard of measure in judgment, the impartial balance to weigh the varied characters and actions of mankind. By this law will be judged the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles, confessors, and martyrs, as well as the ignorant and wicked, who know not God and obey not the gospel. No evangelical liberty, extend it to any conceivable degree, can form an exemption from being obliged here, and judged hereafter, by this rule.

## II. Respecting the immediate OBJECTS of

enquiry with the Supreme Judge, it will not be demanded, By what *aids* did you perform such acts of obedience? or, *whence* had you holy dispositions? For as this constitutes no part of the rule which is common to all who have equal capacities and objective means, it can be no object of judicial proceedings. What the Lawgiver *commands*, the Judge *requires*. Therefore, the *source* of ability, the divine concurrence in all human acts, how much or how little men have been assisted beyond their deserts to discharge incumbent duty,—is out of the question. But the immediate objects of enquiry must be,

First, What *moral means* and opportunities of obedience and conformity to divine law have you enjoyed? ‘That servant who knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew it not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom men (and God, the righteous Governor and Judge,) have committed much, of him they will ask the more.’ Thus, according to the nature and degree of *moral means*, in connexion with natural capacities, must be the nature and the degree of obligation; with which sovereign

influence and regenerating grace must not be confounded. For, on such natural capacities and moral means as constitute a sufficient basis of obligation, the accountable creature has an equitable claim; but on sovereign influence none at all, otherwise ‘ grace would be no more ‘ grace.’

Secondly, Another immediate object of enquiry must be, What have you *been* in your state of probation, what have you *done or omitted*, and what *are* you now? Have you been sincere or hypocritical in your profession of obedience and service? How have you improved your talents and opportunities? Have you sincerely repented, and cordially believed my testimony, as I required? Have you loved me supremely, gratefully received what blessings I bestowed upon you, and done what I commanded you? And what is your present character according to my holy law? ‘ The kingdom of heaven is as a man ‘ travelling into a far country, who called his ‘ own servants, and delivered unto them his ‘ goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to ‘ another two, and to another one.—After a long ‘ time the Lord of those servants cometh, and ‘ reckoneth with them.’—‘ Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall ‘ be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’—‘ Then ‘ shall the King say to them on his right hand,

‘ Come, ye blessed of my Father—for I was an  
 ‘ hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty,  
 ‘ and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and  
 ‘ ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I  
 ‘ was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison,  
 ‘ and ye came unto me.—Then shall he say also  
 ‘ unto them on the left hand, Depart from me,  
 ‘ ye cursed, into everlasting fire—for I was an  
 ‘ hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was  
 ‘ thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a  
 ‘ stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and  
 ‘ ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye  
 ‘ visited me not.—And these shall go away into  
 ‘ everlasting punishment; but the righteous into  
 ‘ life eternal.’\*

III. But what, in this awful PROCESS, this most solemn and interesting of all transactions, is the respective influence of divine Equity and Sovereignty? In reply, I observe,

First, It is but *equitable* that those who are deficient in moral rectitude should be condemned according to their abuse of the capacities, opportunities, and moral means they enjoyed. For  
 ‘ we are sure that the judgment of God is  
 ‘ according to truth;—O man, despisest thou  
 ‘ the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and

\* Matt. xxv. *passim*.

‘ long suffering, not knowing that the goodness  
 ‘ of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after  
 ‘ thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest  
 ‘ up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath,  
 ‘ and *revelation of the righteous judgment of God*;  
 ‘ who will render to every man according to his  
 ‘ deeds.—To them that are contentious and do  
 ‘ not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness,  
 ‘ indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish  
 ‘ upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the  
 ‘ Jew first, and also of the Gentile.’\* The *just*  
 wages of sin is *death*, even that death which  
 stands opposed to *life eternal*. It is a *righteous*  
 thing with God, the supreme arbiter, to re-  
 compensate tribulation to unruly troublers of  
 society, and especially of the good; and ‘to  
 ‘ take vengeance on them who know not God,  
 ‘ and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus  
 ‘ Christ.’

Secondly, On the other hand, seeing that;  
 on account of apostacy and personal disobedience,  
 ‘ every mouth is stopped, and all the  
 ‘ world is become *guilty* before God,’ no one  
 could be acquitted in judgment without the in-  
 terposition of *sovereign favour*. ‘ If thou, Lord,  
 ‘ shouldst *mark* iniquity, (that is, without the  
 ‘ intervention of mercy,) O Lord, who shall

\* Rom. ii. 2—9.



‘stand?’ At the great decisive day it will appear in the clearest light, that it was an act of sovereign favour to *defer* the full punishment of sin, and to constitute a plan of mercy which admitted of delay. And, more especially, it will appear to have been owing to a succession of sovereign acts that any sinner is *prepared* for an honourable acquittal: And particularly, that any of the fallen race are made partakers of *justification*, whereby they are pardoned and ‘accepted in the Beloved;’ of *regeneration*, whereby the dead in sin are made alive to God by the operation of the Holy Spirit; of *adoption*, by virtue of which the ‘outcasts’ are brought into God’s family; of progressive *sanctification*, whereby they are renewed in the spirit of their mind, changed from sinfulness to holiness, and transformed ‘from glory to glory by the ‘Spirit of the Lord;’ and, finally, of *preservation*, in soul and body, whereby they are ‘kept ‘by the power of God through faith unto salvation.’

It is by a *sovereign* constitution, and by virtue of their union to Christ, that the *best* of characters will be *acquitted* in judgment; for in many things ‘all offend,’ and were the Judge to proceed in *strict justice* to mark the failures of the pardoned, renewed, adopted, and sanctified, none would be able to endure the scrutiny. Beside,

it will then appear with superior evidence, that the endless felicity on which they enter, was *prepared* for them by sovereign favour. Their inheritance was *designed* for them before they had a being, and it will be manifest, that their services bore no adequate proportion to the reward, whether we consider the quality, the quantity, or the duration of those services. Then Enoch who so closely walked with God, Noah who so long preached righteousness, Abraham who was so strong in faith, Moses who was so faithful a servant in God's house, Job whose patience was so distinguished, David, the sweet singer of Israel, so devout himself, and whose compositions have enlivened the devotions of others for so many ages, that John who was a burning and shining light among a benighted people, and the other John whose love was so ardent and expansive, Paul who laboured more abundantly than all his associates in the Christian ministry, martyrs who shed their blood in the cause of truth and holiness, and every righteous character at that tribunal—ALL will confess themselves to have been 'unprofitable servants.'

Thirdly, Though strict equity would condemn as deficient the least imperfect of human characters, yet, if we take into account the sovereign plan and operations of the supreme

Governor as the *source* of difference in character and obedience, the honourable acquittal and remuneration of the blessed will appear to rest on equitable grounds. For the *provision* made in the appointment of a Mediator, the *favour* conferred in the imputation of his worthiness, the *mode* adopted in the communication of purity of heart, and the *help* afforded for overcoming the world, the flesh, and the tempter, were by no means incompatible with the rights of God. Such is the profundity of his wisdom in the grand contrivance of mediation, that he will appear *just* in being the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus. ‘Mercy and truth meet  
‘together, righteousness and peace embrace  
‘each other.’ They who shall be ‘found in  
‘him,’ invested with his robe of righteousness,  
‘the righteousness which is of God by faith,’  
are ‘perfected for ever.’

That there should be made a great and lasting *difference* between the righteous and the unrighteous; between penitents, who have mourned for sin, hated and forsaken it; believers, who received God’s testimony; obedient individuals, who took up their cross daily to follow Christ through the tribulations of time; good and faithful servants, who improved their talents for the glory of God and the good of men—that there should be a difference between

these and the opposite characters, all must allow to be *equitable*. The supreme Governor proposes the reward conditionally; as far, therefore, as the condition is performed, as to the mode appointed for obtaining *righteousness* which gives a title, and holiness consisting in all good ‘conversation and godliness,’ which renders meet for heaven, it can be no infringement of the rights of justice that the one is provided for us, and the other wrought in us by a sovereign power.

IV. We come now to enquire, What will be the EFFECTS and consequences of the final Judgment? To the righteous, it is universally allowed, will be allotted a happiness complete and universal; a happiness which implies the purity of their nature, freedom from penal evil, and a full and uninterrupted enjoyment of God the chief good,—God their ‘exceeding joy,’ the ‘strength of their heart and their portion for ever.’ The *life* eternal into which they shall now enter will include the perfection of their nature, and their *well-being* through everlasting ages. But, on the contrary, the miseries of the wicked will be great. What is there terrible in nature, or painful to humanity, which has not been employed by the righteous Governor to represent their miseries? And, indeed, the moral impurity of their nature will prove as constant fuel to the fire of hell. To

which we may add, as no small part of their woe, perpetual molestations and reproaches from every object that presents itself. Even in this life, how different is the sensation excited by a view of a number of innocent children, or an assembly of pious and benevolent men, engaged in divine worship, or consulting to promote the good of others, compared with what is felt by a view of a gang of robbers, or a lawless banditti! What can exceed the woe of banishment ‘from  
‘the presence of the Lord, and from the glory  
‘of his power,’ accompanied with a sense of his displeasure, an accusing conscience, ‘the worm  
‘that never dieth,’ continued iniquity, and insulting and tormenting ghosts: in a word, the loss of the chief good, and a consciousness of that loss?

These are the *effects* of the awful process we have been contemplating, and it is maintained that the consequences are *permanent*, according to right reason as well as the plain testimony of scripture. But as the perpetuity of penal evil has been called in question by persons of different sentiments on other points; as it has been formerly asserted by ORIGEN, and of late revived by theological writers in America and England, and seems to grow fashionable with speculative men in this and other countries,—that the misery of the wicked will not be everlasting,—I shall



submit a few remarks on the subject. In this controversy (for it has acquired a controversial form) the first point of investigation should be, What is the *due* of a moral agent as the transgressor of a divine law which is holy, just, and good? When this is clearly ascertained, no doubt can remain with respect to the question, What is *equitable* conduct in the supreme Governor and Judge towards the transgressor, when the operations of mercy are not taken into the account? Now, if the *desert* of moral evil be not a *penal* natural evil, an *accountable* creature may sin with *impunity*, which involves contradictory ideas. But what is this penal natural evil? Does it arise from the arbitrary frown and continued severity of the Judge, from inflictions incompatible with benevolence, or from the pressure of omnipotence directed by mere will against a feeble creature? This idea, or something similar, seems to be the basis of the universal restoration, when its advocates urge the *injustice* of perpetual suffering for a temporary offence. But if we examine the truth of ideas, and divest them of popular and figurative language, we shall find no room for any supposition of the kind. When an *infliction* of punishment is threatened, it is a declaration of what will be the dreadful *effect* to the sufferer, or the connexion in the nature of things between the offence and its consequence. As it is the *nature* of fire to burn,

and of a flame to consume the moth that rushes into it; so it is the *nature* of an infinitely holy and just Being to afflict and render miserable every being of an opposite quality. 'For our God is a consuming fire.'

Properly speaking, God is no farther opposed to the sufferer by an act of will, than his will is indicative of his nature. And as his nature is invariable, there appears no conceivable way of being freed from penal evil but by a change in the moral qualities of the sufferer. The proper *cause* of suffering is in the subject; while unchangeable purity is only the innocent *occasion*. The sun's light offends and pains a diseased eye, but the cause of pain is the disease, while the ever shining sun is only the source of light and heat, which in their own nature are excellent qualities. That misery which proceeds from a morally depraved nature, will be so far from receiving mitigation from the divine benevolence, while that depravity continues, that the contemplation of it by the subject will increase the anguish. The more amiable and glorious God is in himself, the more intolerable will be a conscious contrariety to him. All objective considerations are but *moral means*, and from all just views of their nature these, however excellent and glorious, cannot *ensure* a change of heart in the subject, though continued for ever.

His free nature, for the very consideration that it is *free*, when left to itself on the ground of mere Equity, *may* revolt for ever, and if *depraved* it necessarily *must*, except a *miracle* of mercy intervene. What other mode conceivable is there in the nature of things whereby a change may be effected? As soon may rivers ascend to their fountains, matter specifically heavy recede from the centre of gravity, or any settled law of nature be reversed, as penal evil cease to exist in a guilty and depraved subject. And even a miracle of mercy can be supposed to effect a change from misery to happiness, only by a removal of the subject's guilt, and the purification of his nature.

To begin this controversy, therefore, with an examination of scriptural phrases, such as 'for ever,' 'for ever and ever,' 'eternal,' 'everlasting,' and the like, as if there were no evidence of the doctrine, that never ending pain is the just wages of sin, *prior* to the consideration of such phrases, is not a fair procedure. This is the ground which the advocates of universal restoration wish to hold; but the true state of the question is, Whether God has given us positive evidence, a degree of evidence sufficient to engage our belief, that he will so far *supersede the claims of strict equity by an act of sovereign favour* as to change the nature of the sufferers,

and thus liberate the subjects of penal suffering from the slavery of sin and the misery it deserves, by constituting them righteous, and converting them from sin to holiness. To suppose that punishment itself, (or *correction*, as the persons I have in view choose to call it,) will effect a reformation, betrays great inattention to the *nature* of that evil which any correction is thought capable of removing. For if penal evil consist not in a positive infliction from the *mere pleasure* of God,—as if any way opposite to his infinite benevolence in general, or his rectoral benevolence to the sufferer in particular,—but in a *consciousness* of defect, of contrariety to rectitude, to holiness, and to every divine perfection, the assumption of a mitigation, or a removal of the evil by its continuance, is unfounded.

We conclude, then, that *prior* to scriptural evidence on either side, the verdict, in point of *equity*, is on the side of *perpetual* suffering. For the same reason that there should be *any* punishment, abstracted from scriptural evidence, it must be *perpetual*, because it is not founded on the *bare will* of the supreme Governor, but on the guilt and depravity of the subject, which qualities, if at all removed, must be removed by a sovereign act of mercy. But mercy, from its very nature, can be no further known by us, than it is

revealed. The remaining question, therefore, is to this effect,—Where is the *evidence* that God will, by an act of *sovereign mercy*, put a period to what must otherwise continue, and rescue infernal prisoners from guilt and depravity, blasphemy and rebellion, with which misery and woe are inseparably connected?—A full discussion of this question, and of the whole subject on this ground, which I presume is the only fair ground, does not comport with my plan in this Essay.\* Yet as there are some things relating to the subject circulated in a popular form,† and with no small degree of confidence, which appear to militate against what I have now advanced, I shall take some notice of them.

Thus the Universalist argues: ‘The Jews  
‘ reject Christ and his religion upon as good  
‘ ground as you reject the Universal Restoration,  
‘ and perhaps better; for you have nothing to  
‘ plead against the restoration, but some threat-  
‘ enings of punishments which are called *ever-*  
‘ *lasting* or *eternal* in our translation; but they  
‘ plead express promises of the *everlasting* con-

\* On the general subject of the *Universal Restoration* the reader may consult Dr. JONATHAN EDWARDS’s Answer to Dr. CHAUNCY.

† By Mr. WINCHESTER, in his Dialogues on *The Universal Restoration*. Second Edit. Lond. 1792.



‘tinuance of their church-state, in opposition  
‘to Christianity.’\* The propriety of the preceding remarks respecting the right mode of conducting this enquiry, is fully apparent from the sophistical argument now quoted. ‘Nothing  
‘to plead against the Restoration but some  
‘threatenings of punishments.’ Yes;—we plead guilt unpardoned, depravity unremoved, the sinful impotence of the offender, the inefficacy of all moral means whatever, and the operations of Equity. ‘The Jews reject Christ and his  
‘religion upon as good ground as you reject  
‘the universal Restoration.’ No;—for the claims of Christ and his religion were substantiated by wisdom and miracles, while there was no natural, infallible, or equitable connexion between the *design* of the Jewish church-state and the rejection of the Messiah. The connexion was of their own making, and had no existence but in their mistaken views of Moses and his law, of Christ and his gospel. Whereas the connexion that subsists between an unholy disposition and suffering is founded in the nature of things, and the only conceivable mode of terminating penal evil is to remove the sinful cause; and except this be done by sovereign, gracious influence, the evil must continue. Consequently, the force of the *terms* expressing the

\* Univ. Restor. p. 16.

duration of both dispensations being *equal*, the conclusion must be as unequal as the connexions before mentioned,

The Universalist again pleads: ‘Your reasoning would be conclusive, upon the supposition that there are two eternal principles, viz. *good and evil*; if it can be proved, that evil is coexistent with goodness, that it hath always been: then, the absolute eternity of sin and misery may be easily inferred. This is the true foundation of endless misery, and it came from the pagan theology.’\* It seems, then, that evil may coexist with goodness for *ages of ages*, but may not any longer, without running into Manicheism. The question is not at present, What is the sovereign good pleasure of God respecting the termination of penal evil, but whether it is inconsistent with the divine perfections to perpetuate the sufferings of the guilty. If not inconsistent to continue them for a thousand years, by what rule can we draw a boundary? Is it by the rule of exactly proportioning the punishment to the crime? We allow such a rule; but we also maintain that a diversity of *degrees* is adequate to preserve an equitable proportion, without having recourse to

\* Univ. Restor. p. 30.

a temporary *duration*. Few will question that there are numerous degrees on the scale of happiness; why then should it be doubted that there are degrees greatly varied on the scale of sufferings?

Beside, the argument founded on the incompatibility of the everlasting coexistence of good and evil proves too much, and involves the annihilation of creatures as necessary. For a creature without *any* evil is an absolute impossibility, that is, the evil of comparative defect; therefore some evil must necessarily coexist with all created being. Consequently, this argument, if it have any force, would require not only the removal of penal evil from the subject, but also his annihilation. God alone is absolutely good, from eternity to eternity, and therefore the only mode of preventing *all* evil is not to afford existence to any creature.—But on the subject in general we may ask, Of what attribute would the rights be infringed; of what perfection would the glory be eclipsed, by not liberating a guilty, polluted, and rebellious prisoner? Is there any spot in the universe where he *could* be happy, without an *internal* change? Are not these prisoners *offenders*, unceasing offenders, as well as sufferers? How absurd the notion that hell is a prison for the *innocent* who

are confined by arbitrary power in consideration of a few past offences, and who would be very good, obedient, and happy, were they emancipated! Neither scripture, nor sound reason, acknowledges any such prisoners.

We again ask, Are continued sufferings contrary to *Equity*? If so, there would be a ground of *claim* on deliverance, which the sufferer, though still unchanged, might plead as his *due*. But how preposterous the thought! Are continued sufferings contrary to *Benevolence*? Then for a period called *ages of ages*, God in punishing offenders, opposing rebels, or leaving them to themselves, would act in contrariety to his benevolent nature. How impious to imagine it! Is the continuance of sufferings contrary to *Wisdom*? It is sufficient to say, that we can have no *data*, from the nature of the case, to determine what is, or is not, conformable to wisdom, except what God himself has revealed; —which refers to *another* question. Only he can determine what is consistent with infinite wisdom, and it is our province to learn his declared will. *Justice* is founded on relations, but the exercise of *Mercy* is founded on supreme and infinitely wise prerogative, which no creature can possibly know further than it is revealed. We may therefore conclude, that the inference for *endless misery* is fairly drawn from

the nature of *sin* and the *Equity* of God, without having recourse to the absurd notion of two eternal principles.

We are further told, that ‘ another great ‘ principle upon which the restoration depends, ‘ is, that Christ died for all.\* But how does the supposition imply the inference? His death must be considered either as making a proper *purchase*; or, as a meritorious *expedient*, denoting a *price* of redemption, on account of which God bestows favours on the unworthy. If the former, why should Christ suffer his purchased possession to lie enslaved in misery for *ages of ages*, as the Universalists allow? Does not his blood cleanse from *all sin* without the intervention of so long a period of penal torments? If the latter, why should this great expedient in the divine economy imply a restoration to purity and happiness, any more than other displays of goodness and bounty rejected or abused? Christ having ‘ died for ‘ all,’ therefore, in whatever way we understand the phrase, proves either nothing on the point in question, or proves too much. And particularly, in the sense of an expedient or valuable price paid to divine justice, and proclaimed to mortals as their only ground of hope, that

\* Univ. Restor. p. 91.



glorious fact can no more *ensure* a restoration, without the communication of divine influence to produce a new nature, than a favour prepared and offered, but yet rejected or abused, can promote friendship.

Once more: ‘ Another principle upon which  
‘ the universal doctrine depends, is, the un-  
‘ changeableness of God: whom he loves once,  
‘ he always loves; he loved his creatures when  
‘ he made them, as none can well deny; their  
‘ sins he never loved, nor ever will: he hath  
‘ declared, that he loved us when sinners, but  
‘ never *as* sinners. His eternal and constant  
‘ hatred of all sin, and his unchangeable love  
‘ to all his creatures, are of the nature of primary  
‘ truths; from which the doctrine of the general  
‘ restoration may be easily and plainly inferred.\*  
On this representation it is natural to ask, If  
God’s unchangeable love of all his creatures be  
not inconsistent with their punishment for *ages*  
*of ages*, how can the *unchangeableness* of Deity  
prevent the protraction of that punishment? If  
he loved them while punished for a long period,  
why may he not continue to love them, as his  
creatures? ‘ Whom he loves once, he *always*  
‘ loves;’ consequently *love* is not incompatible  
with *punishment*, on the objector’s own principles.

\* Univ. Restor. p. 96.

‘ He loved his creatures when he made them ;  
‘ he loved us *when* sinners, but never *as* sinners ;’  
therefore to love any as *creatures*, though not  
as *sinners*, is perfectly consistent with a state of  
punishment. From whence it follows, that the  
‘ unchangeableness’ of God contributes nothing  
to the doctrine of restoration.

Finally, ‘ Another of the first principles of  
‘ the restoration, is, the immutability of God’s  
‘ counsels, which he hath confirmed by an oath,  
‘ that by two immutable things (viz. his word  
‘ and oath) in which it was impossible for God  
‘ to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who  
‘ have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope  
‘ set before us. Heb. vi. 17, 18.’\* What a  
strange application and perversion of a sacred  
truth ! ‘ Who have fled for refuge.’ Is not  
here an evident implication, that those who have  
not fled for refuge are debarred from consolation ?  
Is this a passage from which the enemies of  
Christ and the neglecters of his great salvation,  
can reap consolation ? Has not eternal truth de-  
clared that the final Judge will ‘ come to take  
‘ vengeance on them that know not God, and  
‘ obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ?’  
And that they ‘ shall be punished with ever-  
‘ lasting destruction from the presence of the

\* Univ. Restor. p. 96.

‘ Lord, and from the glory of his power ; when  
‘ he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and  
‘ to be admired in all them that believe—in  
‘ that day?’ Whom shall we credit, the apostle  
Paul, rather the divine Spirit by whom he  
was influenced, or the Universalists? Not to  
insist, that every part of God’s testimony must  
be consistent with other parts, what passage is  
there in the New Testament, consistently inter-  
preted, expressive of the divine *counsel* to trans-  
late any rebels from hell to heaven? If there  
be no such testimony, surely ‘ the *immutability*’  
of God’s counsels can never be pleaded as an  
argument in the case.

I know it has been asserted, that ‘ the Justice  
‘ of God requires—that misery should not pre-  
‘ ponderate over happiness through the whole  
‘ extent of individual existence, so that being  
‘ should upon the whole be a curse to any of his  
‘ creatures.’\* But such gratuitous assertions,  
unsupported by even plausible arguments, de-  
serve little notice. All must allow, that to  
restore sinful creatures to a state of purity and  
happiness, is an exercise of mercy ; but that God  
is required, in justice, to exercise mercy, involves  
a contradiction. And what it becomes him to  
do, in the exercise of benevolence and mercy,

\* BELSHAM’S Elem. p. 350.

cannot possibly be known, from the nature of the case, but by himself, or from a revelation of his will. If creatures continue rebellious and impure, *why* should not misery ‘preponderate over happiness through the whole extent of individual existence?’ And *why* should not their being, upon the whole, be a curse to them, while they continue in a state of hostility?

It has been again affirmed, that ‘the tendency of all moral evil, and of its concomitant, natural evil, is to their *own extermination*’—and ‘since the vicious are to be raised and exposed to suffering, it is highly reasonable to believe that these sufferings will be *remedial*, and will terminate with the vices that gave birth to them, so that in the end ‘death will be swallowed up in victory.’\* These assertions are equally gratuitous as the others. What evidence is there for the supposition, that the tendency of evils is to their own extermination? *Why*, I ask, must the sufferings of the vicious be remedial? Not, surely, because they are raised and exposed to suffering. Nor can it be that God would cease to be infinitely just and benevolent by the continuance of their suffering. *Why* should their perpetual sufferings for perpetual

\* BELSHAM’s Elem. p, 401, 403.

crimes affect his perfections? Or, in what conceivable way can evil remedy itself? That God *can* overrule and overcome evil is not disputed; but to conclude from what he can to what he will do, is not valid.



## CHAP. VI.

A VIEW OF SOVEREIGNTY AS A DIVINE PREROGATIVE,  
AND OF ITS EXERCISE IN ADOPTING ENDS AND  
MEANS.

## SECT. I.

*Of Sovereignty as a Divine Prerogative.*

A DEFINITION of Sovereignty, ascertaining the sense in which I understand it, has been already given. It is now intended to enter somewhat more particularly into the subject, in order to guard against false views and illegitimate deductions, and to prove that God is actually possessed of what I term ‘Sovereignty,’ as an unalienable prerogative. Some indeed have objected to the word because it is not a scriptural term; but surely this is an unreasonable prejudice, which if indulged would reduce the noblest of all sciences under a base subjection to the poverty of language. This would not be the way to prevent controversy, or to preclude discussion, for opposite parties have professed an adherence to scriptural phraseology, as Trinitarians, Arians, and Socinians. Agreement, in such cases, could be only in *words* while the ideas annexed to them were totally different. But what are words without ideas? When words are adopted as expressive of important ideas

in any discussion, much unnecessary circumlocution is prevented; and the contrary method would lead us to condemn all translations and expositions of the sacred writings.

The doctrine I would now defend is this, That God possesses an *absolute right* to will and to do whatever is not inconsistent with his fixed *purpose*, his *nature* and *perfections*, or, in one word, his EQUITY. This idea being distinctly and accurately conceived, we shall be prepared to discover some very important consequences necessarily connected with it, consequences well calculated to adjust and settle many theological points which have been much agitated among controvertists.

At the commencement of this discussion we should recollect, that an absolute right of Sovereignty in God cannot be supposed to extend so far as to *counteract* a divine purpose or decree; because this would imply a *change* of purpose unworthy of him who is unchangeable, 'whose purpose shall stand,' even when he does 'all his pleasure.' A change of purpose would involve the idea that he had purposed imperfectly, with some defect of wisdom and foresight; or capriciously, without a plan worthy of himself. A *purpose to change* his mode of proceeding towards different objects, by no means

implies a *change of purpose*. And when any expressions or events recorded in scripture, seem capable of an interpretation which may favour the latter meaning, if we regard only the phraseology, owing to the defect of language, we should have recourse to first principles, and consider what is worthy of God's nature and character as elsewhere clearly ascertained.

It behoves us also to be on our guard, lest we should confound or identify the divine *purposes*, in their most comprehensive import, with the mere *settled laws of nature*. For, supposing these to be suspended, controlled, any way counteracted, or even annihilated, it would by no means argue a change of purpose, but rather a purpose to change. Though some persons permit themselves to speak very slightly, I may say with great rashness, of supposed divine *decrees* and *purposes*, in the commonly received sense of the terms; yet few, if any, will object to a *right* in God to form *some* eternal and unchangeable decrees. And if such decrees be supposed possible in their nature, and not inconsistent with God's perfections, or universal Equity, it necessarily follows that the forming of such decrees is included within the province of the supreme prerogative of Sovereignty.

Let it, therefore, be distinctly understood,

that the supreme prerogative, the right of sovereignty now asserted, excludes all purpose and conduct of God that is inconsistent with giving to all their *due*; for, a supposed purpose of withholding from any one his just claim, would be unequitable. Far be it from me to ascribe to the infinitely good and perfect Being a prerogative to violate *rectitude*! These things considered, our proposition first proposed for demonstration, may be rendered a little more specific, and more appropriate to the intended purpose of this work, thus: The Sovereignty of God implies, an absolute right to will and to do whatever is not inconsistent with *that Equity which gives to all accountable moral agents their DUE*. The *importance* of this proposition, if true, as a principle in Theology, must be evident to all who have duly attended to the subject. If God were not *essentially sovereign*, in the sense now explained—not only the bible would be an unintelligible book, difficulties insuperable would attend all its other doctrines, and every supposed system would be full of perplexities, but—there would be in my view no system of religion or even morality worth contending for. And yet if this doctrine be established, what becomes of the popular outcry against the Calvinistic doctrines of Grace?

That Sovereignty, in our sense of the term,

is a prerogative essential to Deity, might appear to an impartial mind from this one general consideration, that it is a real *excellency*, an obvious and universally acknowledged excellency, in all rational beings, to possess and exercise a prerogative similar in kind, according to the degree in which it prevails. Therefore, as this, no less than every other 'good and perfect gift,' proceeds from God, he must possess it in an infinite degree. But more particularly,

I. The absolute right of the supreme Majesty of heaven and earth to the exercise of such a prerogative towards moral agents, may be argued from the *self-existence* and *independence* of his nature. How necessarily do these perfections of God imply that he is above control, with respect to his creatures! Who in earth or heaven has a right to say, in the language of remonstrance, 'What doest thou?' If this prerogative be necessarily implied in absolute independence, neither the existence nor the non-existence of beings who are the production of his power and wise pleasure, can possibly affect its exercise. It cannot be supposed that he would, or indeed possibly could *alienate* from himself what is an essential excellency of his self-existent and independent nature. Whatever prerogatives he has conferred on men or angels, we are certain that they are *dependent* on him,



and that he is *independent* of them. The facts are correlative, and the evidence of both is equal.

Were every human being and all existing worlds instantly annihilated, the exercise of this divine prerogative could not be affected by the event. God would still possess the right of giving existence to other beings and worlds, a right incapable of control or diminution. And is it not equally evident that this right extends to the good *mode* and *condition* of all created existence? What but this can account for the amazing *variety* of creatures, and for the *degrees* in the scale of being and of excellence among them? And, in confirmation of this right, we may further ask, Can there be any ground of remonstrance conceivable to be rationally urged by any one, in all this astonishing assemblage of beings, however dishonourable and mean in comparison of others, as far as the divine appointment is concerned?

II. The right of exercising this prerogative towards all accountable moral agents, may be argued from the *all-sufficiency* of God and his absolute *liberty*, or freedom to choose out of all possibles, whatever might most effectually manifest the glory of his nature and perfections, while nothing is withheld from them that is their due. Those, indeed, who plead for a *self-determining power* in man, suppose that this is a sufficient

bar in the way of that exercise of sovereignty which is here maintained; but they seem not to be aware, that the very *principle* for which they contend, the high prerogative of FREE WILL as the ultimate source of all determinations, effectually subverts itself when applied to man, and the whole system erected upon it. For there cannot be *two supreme wills* any more than there can be two self-existences, independencies, or all-sufficiencies. Therefore, as they allow that *free will* is essential to Deity, the question is resolved to this, Which of these wills is *supreme*? Can there be any just ground of hesitation? What is there in scripture, in experience, or in the nature of things, that can induce us to suppose the free will of God to be *dependent*, in its determinations, on the free will of man, or of any creature?

The truth is, that even the *free will* of God is not a *self-determining* power, but is itself determined by his holy, blessed, perfect nature, in a word, his ALL-SUFFICIENCY. And every created will, however free, is determined by the nature, or the degree of sufficiency or insufficiency in the free agent. For every will is the medium or instrument of power, and all power is necessarily proportionate to the degree of sufficiency or insufficiency in the agent, by whom the power is exerted and the will employed. Now, as the source of the divine free will is all-sufficient, and

that of human free will inferior and subordinate, it clearly follows that the right of Sovereignty includes a supreme control over that source of insufficiency by which the human agent is determined. Thus we see that God has an absolute right to influence and control, in an *indirect* way, the most uncontrollable thing in man, his free will. I said, in an 'indirect' way; because the *direct* influence and control are on the heart or *nature*, and not on the *will* of the agent.

The reader will perceive, and let him always keep in mind, that the divine prerogative here asserted is that of a Benefactor. Some, indeed, have most unwarrantably inferred, that it must extend to the *appointment* of defectibility, or a *decree* of the *cause* of a defective choice; but they did not sufficiently advert to that which actually determines free will, either in God or in man. They have justly argued, that there cannot be two supreme wills, and that the free will of man cannot be a supreme self-determining power; but they falsely concluded that the will of God is possessed of that character. They also did not duly consider the *true cause* of defectibility and insufficiency, which is, demonstrably, a *negative principle* related to every created nature, as a *contrast* to absolute being and perfections; but imagined it to be a positive principle, created

with our being. And thus they have ascribed to the *will* of God every degree of limitation, insufficiency, and defectibility, in man and every other creature, instead of regarding them as *consequences*, independent of all will, resulting from the *absolute nature* of God, which necessarily excludes every other unlimited, self-sufficient, and indefectible nature. Nor could they properly reflect upon the absurd and ruinous consequences that necessarily result from the principle they adopted. For instance, on their assumption, all *defects*, and consequently the sinfulness of all free actions, must be ascribed to the sovereign will of God, as well as all excellencies. And thus contrary effects must be assigned to the same cause! Good and evil must have one and the same origin! Besides, by ascribing all defective principles to the supreme will, as the objects of sovereignty, we ascribe to God what is needless, and what is infinitely unworthy of him: *needless*, because the defective principles of limitation, dependence, insufficiency, mutability, and the like, are *essentially related* to every possible being, except the first, who is absolute, uncaused, and infinite, without any supposition of appointment, decree, or will in the case; for no voluntary intervention could make it otherwise. It is also infinitely *unworthy* of God, that he should be the voluntary producer of defective principles. Does

not the supposition imply, most impiously, that God is possessed of such principles himself, else how could they possibly proceed from him by decree, will, or any other conceivable mode?

III. In proof of the general thesis, the absolute right of God to exercise towards moral agents the sovereignty or prerogative defined, we next appeal to *the essential imperfection of all creatures*. As there can be but one absolutely perfect Being, it necessarily follows that all other beings must be essentially imperfect in comparison of him. But this imperfection, whether we call it limitation, insufficiency, or by any other name, implies, that essential perfection should have an absolute right to dispose of the subject to whom it relates in any possible way consistent with equity. Among the imperfections essential to accountable free agents, that of *defectibility* is the most awfully interesting. Nothing is more characteristic of the difference between the Creator and his intelligent creatures, than absolute sufficiency and indefectibility in him, and in them the reverse. What then can be more evident, or more necessary for their welfare, than the right in God to control, to influence, to direct, or to preserve, according to his absolute but wise pleasure, the subjects of his holy government? How preposterous, how contradictory the supposition, that



God could bestow capacities and powers over which he had no right of control, and the abuses of which he could not rectify? Had the adorable Creator a right to make man upright? How unreasonable, then, is the thought, that by so doing, he has alienated his right of sovereign prerogative to provide, from foresight and purpose, a remedy for him as apostatized? Does he not still retain his liberty of having ‘mercy ‘on whom he will have mercy,’ and of being ‘gracious to whom he will be gracious?’

IV. The sovereignty here maintained is implied in *divine wisdom*. Wisdom supposes, as notions essential to it, foresight, contrivance, and provision; therefore infinite wisdom must exclude all chance, or absolute contingency, and settle every thing in such a manner, and to such an infallible degree, as never to be surprised by any thing new, unknown, or unexpected. This clearly implies an absolute right to exclude all chance, and also to will and to do whatever is not unequitable. But is it unequitable to counteract defects, and confer benefits, according to infallible wisdom? Surely wisdom belongs unto God, and known unto him are all his works of nature and grace, in every degree, and to the latest period. To *effect all good*, and to *prevent much evil*, are sovereign acts; and not one of these can be

imagined, with any degree of plausibility, to be unjust. But not any thing advanced in this argument, or in this work, implies that *moral evil* is an object of sovereign *causation*; for this would involve a violation of equity towards the creature, and an impeachment of universal justice, which every principle and argument employed tend to obviate. Divine equity, indeed, like the law, affords an innocent *occasion* for moral evil to shew itself; but sovereign wisdom has contrived, and gracious power effects, the *prevention* of its universal spread through the intelligent creation. And not only is much moral evil not permitted to take place, but divine wisdom, in instances innumerable, takes *occasion* from moral evil not hindered, to exercise sovereign mercy.

V. The sovereign prerogative here defended is implied in the *chief end* for which all created existences must have been made. That God ‘made *all things* for himself,’ that is, to represent his own glorious perfections and excellencies, is at once the language of sacred scripture, and the verdict of sound philosophy.\* But if so, is it conceivable that he should not possess and exercise an absolute sovereignty over

\* See President EDWARDS’S Dissertation, concerning the End for which GOD created the world. *Passim*.

all persons and things? If moral agents in our world, possessed of freedom, means of happiness, and capacities for glorifying God and enjoying him for ever, ‘despise the riches of his ‘goodness and forbearance,’ and precipitate themselves into sin and rebellion, guilt and ruin, who can reasonably entertain the thought, that God has not an absolute prerogative of sovereignty to be merciful and gracious to whom he will, in a way devised by infinite wisdom? After the evidence now produced, I hope it is unnecessary to enlarge, and trust it may be said without arrogance, that the original proposition is fairly demonstrated, viz. That God has an absolute right to will and to do whatever is not inconsistent with equity,—that equity which gives to all accountable moral agents their DUE.

I am not aware of any objections that may be urged against the preceding arguments with any plausibility. It remains, therefore, to notice the obvious *consequences* which naturally flow from the proofs given. It follows, first, that God had an absolute right to *predestinate* whom he pleased of his rational creatures to grace and obedience, faith and good works, happiness and glory. Secondly, that God had an absolute right to *redeem* some of the human race from sin and misery with a sovereign *speciality*. Thirdly, that God has an absolute right

to confer *special favours* upon, and to infuse gracious principles into whom he pleases. Fourthly, that God has an absolute right to *determine the will* of a free agent by his gracious influence on the heart, whence all virtuous determinations take their immediate rise. Finally, that God has an absolute right to cause all those who are saints, to *persevere* in a state of grace and obedience unto everlasting salvation. —Every one of these consequences, I conceive, follows inevitably from the doctrine before proved; nor does there appear any implication of what is unequitable, in the smallest degree, but much that is kind, benevolent, and merciful. By rejecting this doctrine we admit glaring contradictions and endless confusion; by allowing it we introduce consistency and order, and possess a rational ground of faith and hope, and a sublime and edifying view of the divine character.

## SECT. II.

*Of the Exercise of Divine Sovereignty as related to a System of Ends and Means.*

IT is the character of intelligent beings to act with design, and it is the province of wisdom to seek the best ends by the most laudable means. An intelligent agent without design, and a wise agent without a system of ends and means, are incompatible ideas. *System* admits of indefinite degrees of amplitude and combination. There is not a mechanic of the humblest order, who does not act upon system; and the excellency or defect of his work must be estimated by the worthiness of his design and the completeness of the execution. When we rise to higher schemes, as to the sublimer parts of mechanism or architecture, painting or poetry; marks of design, regular dependence, and suitable subordination pervading the whole complexure, we are struck with admiration. We admire the effect, but still more the skill of the artist who has exercised so much penetrating foresight and wise contrivance. What shall we then say, and how should we feel, when we contemplate the mechanism and system of the universe! How amazing the knowledge, the wisdom, the skill, and the goodness of its



Author! How sublime the design, and how wonderful the arrangement! ‘O Lord, our  
 ‘ Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the  
 ‘ earth! who hast set thy glory above the  
 ‘ heavens.—When I consider the heavens, the  
 ‘ work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars  
 ‘ which thou hast ordained; what is man, that  
 ‘ thou art mindful of him? and the son of man  
 ‘ that thou visitest him?’ How exquisite is the  
 system itself, and how astonishing are those  
 laws, rules, or methodical energies, by which  
 the whole and every part are sustained and  
 directed! ‘O Lord, how manifold are thy  
 ‘ works! in wisdom hast thou made them all;  
 ‘ the earth is full of thy riches.’

From schemes of art and the physical system of the universe, let us turn to plans of government. Here also we find many gradations, from a small family or a school to the largest kingdoms or empires. The larger the circle, the greater need of wisdom to contrive plans, and to direct power. Power without wisdom is ever liable to become tyrannical, and wisdom without power is inefficient. Of human governments, that must be the most perfect in which the welfare of the whole is best promoted with fewest disadvantages to individuals.

But human laws, as well as the divine, result from constituted relations; and the excellency

of any government must be estimated by the wise adaptation of remedies to evils, including the characters, dispositions, habits, and innumerable circumstances of the subjects. A perfection of government, under whatever form, abstracted from the dispositions and characters of men, together with local, temporary, and other circumstances, is a chimera formed in the fancies of shallow minds. However, the larger and more complicated the system, the greater necessity is there for wisdom and address; and often the abilities of numerous individuals are not adequate to guard against anarchy, convulsions, revolutions, and ruin.

What wisdom, and skill, and power, are therefore needful for the government of all intelligent creatures in all worlds! Jehovah is the *universal* monarch; his is 'the kingdom, 'the power and the glory.' 'By him kings 'reign, and princes decree justice.' If Solomon's wisdom (which was first pure, and then peaceable,) 'excelled the wisdom of Egypt,' we are reminded that God 'gave Solomon wisdom.' 'His understanding is infinite,' and 'there is 'no wisdom against the Lord.'—'Blessed be 'the name of God for ever and ever; for 'wisdom and might are his. And he changeth 'the times and the seasons: he removeth kings 'and setteth up kings; he giveth wisdom to

‘ the wise, and knowledge to them that know  
 ‘ understanding. He revealeth the deep and  
 ‘ secret things; he knoweth what is in the  
 ‘ darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.’  
 Well might the inhabitants of heaven exclaim  
 with a great voice, ‘ Alleluiah! Salvation, and  
 ‘ glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord  
 ‘ our God: for true and righteous are his judge-  
 ‘ ments.’ Well might they ‘ fall down and  
 ‘ worship God that sat on the throne, saying,  
 ‘ Amen, Alleluiah—praise ye our God, all ye  
 ‘ his servants, and ye that fear him, both small  
 ‘ and great.’ And, finally, well might there be  
 ‘ heard as it were the voice of a great multitude,  
 ‘ and as the voice of many waters, and as the  
 ‘ voice of mighty thunderings, saying Alleluiah,  
 ‘ for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.’

As the testimony of scripture and the piety  
 of heaven, delight to ascribe unto God the  
 glory due to his name, so do true philosophy  
 and impartial reason. Every system, whether  
 natural, civil, or moral, implies an *ultimate end*,  
 and *means* of attaining it. We shall therefore  
 consider the moral system in reference to these  
 two fundamental and comprehensive ideas, be-  
 ginning, as is most natural, with the former. As  
 God is infinitely wise, and as it is the discrimi-  
 native character of wisdom to act with design,  
 so infinite wisdom proposes the *best end* to be

accomplished in the *best manner*. If, therefore, divine moral government be conducted with wisdom, as undoubtedly it is, it must refer to some *ultimate end* worthy of that wisdom.

Prior to decretive choice, every thing stood in the divine all-sufficiency, and in the rank of *mere possibles*. The adoption, then, of one system in preference to all others, must be excellent in proportion to the wisdom of the designing cause. Not that any *effect* can be *infinite*, as the cause is; for that would imply a contradiction,—one infinite producing another. A system *infinitely* great or good is an *impossibility*,—a supposition as impossible, as that God should cease to be infinite. Not only the aggregate of all existing worlds, but also of all *possible* worlds, compared with *absolute infinity*, are as nothing. And this impossibility of any effect being positively infinite, is the highest glory of the ever adorable Uncaused Being, whose name is Jehovah. If at any time the word ‘infinite’ be used in reference to the works of God, it must be understood as relating to our limited comprehension.

Though in the amazing plan of Creation and Providence there are ‘*imperia in imperio*,’ or, in the language of Ezekiel, ‘as it were a wheel in ‘the middle of a wheel,’ yet, it is reasonable to

suppose that all the parts, however numerous and complicated to our view, compose one grand whole. If *all things*, in the natural, civil, and moral world, ‘*work together for good*’ to them that love God, to them who are the ‘called according to his purpose,’ how reasonable is the conclusion, that all things, in all worlds, *co-operate* to promote one grand *ultimate end* designed by unerring wisdom! We now contemplate the moral system as we find it actually displayed, and argue concerning it on the principles of reason; that is to say, principles which approve themselves to right reason, without dependence on mere *testimony*, though suggested by divine revelation. Infinite wisdom implies infallible *prescience*; and the following description must approve itself to every reasonable being as expressive of the character of the first designing Cause: ‘I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the *end* from the *beginning*, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.’

Admitting, as we must, the divine prescience, the *result* of free agency must have been *known* before any creatures exercised their free will. And yet, with perfect prescience of events, in every instance, he gave those beings and capa-



cities without which neither the use nor abuse of liberty could have taken place. The defection of man was clearly seen, if created and circumstanced in a given manner, and yet he *was* created. And all the crimes of the human race were distinctly foreseen, on supposition of existing circumstances; nevertheless it is the plan of providence that they *have* existence, and it is a fact that they transgress righteous and holy laws. Yet it is a demonstrable truth, that neither the defection and crimes, nor their cause, originate in Him who is goodness and purity. From these considerations it must follow, however paradoxical it may appear at first view, that man is *at once*, but in different respects, the subject of *liberty* and *necessity*, as sure as the exercise of *justice* and *mercy* was to take place in God's plan of moral government. If man be not *free* to evil, he is not a moral subject; and if he be not *necessitated* to good, he cannot be under the influence of sovereign wisdom and mercy. As liberty is essential to government, so necessity is essential to wisdom. If man be not free, he is not accountable; and if the foreseen result of abused freedom in apostacy, guilt, depravity and moral impotence, be not provided for by a necessitating plan of gracious influence, no one of the fallen race can be saved.

Divine infallible prescience viewed things and events as they actually *would* be, and not dubiously as they possibly *might* be. There must, therefore, be in the nature of things a ground—a certain ground, as contradistinguished from all uncertainty—of the foreseen event. An infallible prescience of any event which has no ground of certainty in the nature of things, involves contradictory ideas; implying that an event might be and might not be, without any ground of difference; or, that certainty and uncertainty, contrary things, are identified. It has been asserted, and on the surest ground, that the foreseen certainty of defects and crimes cannot be ascribed to the divine decree; what then is the ground of certainty? The true answer is, A negative principle of defectibility as inseparably and essentially related to all created existence. This, and this alone, can solve the problem, in connexion with a positive and necessitating causation of good. This excludes all chance and uncertainty, while God is infinitely remote from being the *cause* of moral evil.

The apostacy and ruin of men being foreseen in an adequate certain cause, the next enquiry is, Might they not recover themselves without a necessitating sovereignty? We may safely assert, the supposition is impossible in the nature

of things. For, in reference to a moral system, there is no conceivable medium between Equity and Sovereignty, and their respective operations. What is not an effect of the former, must be an effect of the latter. Now is it conceivable that mere Equity, without the intervention of Sovereignty, should both condemn and acquit, punish and release, a guilty and rebellious subject? Or that the subject by some exertion of his own may rise to perfect innocence and obedience? If left to his freedom when in a state of perfection he fell, where is there a ground, a principle, a possibility, in the nature of things, of his recovery to his primitive condition, without a sovereign interposition and assistance? If his capacity, his freedom, and the most engaging means, were not adequate to *preserve* him in a state of *active goodness*, or did not so in fact, what basis of hope is left, according to the operations of justice, that he will *recover* himself from guilt, disorder, and misery?

It may be here observed, If all the operations of God relative to a moral system must proceed either from Equity or Sovereignty, and if the operations of the latter be only those of beneficence, as before explained and proved; it follows, that the former alone has operation in reference to the defection and crimes of moral subjects, as well as in their punishment. Was

any *sin*, or any proper *cause* of sin, in man or angel, from *sovereign* will, appointment, or causation? Impossible. We might as well ask, Is darkness from the light, enmity from love, folly from wisdom, or weakness from power? Was it then from *Equity*, as an *impelling cause*, or as any proper *cause*, that apostacy entered into the moral system, and crimes are continued from age to age? Equally impossible. For this would involve the absurd consequences, that Equity and Injustice are the same, and that sin, rebellion, and anarchy are good things. We are then argumentatively constrained to conclude, that the *cause* of defection in the moral system is not in or from the supreme Governor, but in the *subject*. But has the subject any principle, source, or cause, which he has not *received* from his Creator? Most assuredly he *has*, as sure as he is the subject of limitation, defectibility, a want of independence and all-sufficiency, or any other negative relation. The proper *cause* of defection, and every sin in the universe, is a *negative principle* essentially *related* to the subject of moral government, and related indeed to every creature that exists, or possibly can exist. And it is the glory of God, his eternal dignity and pre-eminence, that no being but himself *can* be destitute of this negative principle.

This is the ultimate source of failure in

a moral system, of which that Equity which gives every one his *due*, is only the innocent *occasion*; and it is the prerogative of sovereign grace and mercy, from the ruin thus introduced by man, to erect a monument, to build an everlasting Temple, on which may be inscribed GLORY TO GOD and SALVATION TO MEN; God, the infinitely wise, merciful, and powerful architect; and men, the living and ornamented materials. To these it may be said, ‘Ye are God’s ‘building’—‘an habitation of God through the ‘Spirit.’ And of them it may be asserted, in a sense truly sublime and wonderful, ‘This people ‘have I formed for myself, they shall shew ‘forth my praise.’ Here ‘*grace* reigns through ‘*righteousness* unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ ‘our Lord.’ Here *mercy* and *truth* are met together, *righteousness* and *peace* have kissed each other,

Thus the exercise of divine Equity afforded the *occasion* of failure in the moral system, an occasion, however, absolutely innocent; and the criminal failure, however detestable and ruinous in itself, gave *occasion* to the exercise of Sovereign Mercy. By the exercise of the former, the subject was merely suffered to fall; because to *hinder* the event was not *due* to him, otherwise he could not possibly have fallen: and without the exercise of the latter, it is equally



impossible that he should rise to spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Hence the contrivance of profound wisdom in adopting an ULTIMATE END, to which every thing in the system, however contingent in human estimation, should be infallibly subservient. This end is the GLORY OF GOD, his justice, and mercy, in the salvation of his chosen through a Mediator. And hence the MEANS, by which these and all divine perfections are displayed to the highest advantage, in the plan and economy of Redemption. The scheme is truly wonderful, when we contemplate it as a system of possibility, or of consistency in the nature of things; but our admiration is increased when we contemplate its efficiency, in the actual salvation of sinful creatures. When we reflect upon the number saved, millions of mankind, both small and great ‘standing before the throne,’ having been ‘redeemed from among men’ who were exposed to endless misery, are we not ‘lost in wonder, love, and praise?’—  
 ‘These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.  
 ‘Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.’

If we put the question, *Why was man PER-*

MITTED to *fall*? The answer is, Because it was *good*, and must *appear* to be good, *worthy* of the Supreme Majesty, to *shew* his independence, all-sufficiency, and indefectibility, as well as his benevolence, to the intelligent universe. And how is it conceivable that this should be done, but by giving to each his *due* in the exercise of Equity? And how can this be conceived of as possible, but by *permitting* some intelligent beings to *manifest* their true character of limitation, their absolute dependence on divine favour, their comparative insufficiency to preserve themselves, and that they stood essentially related to a cause of defectibility? If they were not *liable* to fall from righteousness and holiness, they would not be *free*, they would not be *creatures*; and if not *permitted* to fall, how could it be *manifested* to the intelligent universe what God is, and what they are, as to their essential characters, as Creator and creatures, as Governor and governed? Can any fertility of fancy, or any force of genius, imagine any other mode of *manifesting* the awful difference between indefectible and defectible beings, beside that of the former permitting the latter, in Equity, to develop their essential characters?

Besides, supposing no *actual* failure had been permitted to take place in the moral system to the present moment, still the *liability*

of it would *always* remain, if the moral Governor sovereignly prevented not by affording to free agents more than their due claim. The question would still return, Is it good, is it worthy, that there should be a manifestation of the essential characters of the parties related at *any* period, or is it not? Is not the negative of this question contrary to justice and reason? What *justice* is there in the demand, that a defectible being should *not be permitted* to develop the reality of his essential character? And what *reason* is there in requiring that God should not shew himself to be *equitable* in giving to all their due, his own character included? But without leaving some free agents to themselves, as a matter of public notoriety, who can conceive it possible for him to shew himself to be thus equitable to himself and others? If any pretend that God who had it in his power, was bound in justice to prevent sin, let them beware of ‘charging God foolishly;’ for he did not prevent it. And independently of the fact, they absurdly identify *justice* and *favour*, denoting that the moral Governor cannot be *just* except he be *favourable* to his subjects beyond their due!

On the other hand, if the question be put, *Why are any REDEEMED from sin and misery?* We answer, first, Because it was good, and

eminently *worthy* of infinite benevolence, to display divine *mercy* under the direction, or according to the dictates of unerring wisdom. But is it conceivable that mercy can be displayed without a plan of redemption? Indeed *grace* may be manifested in the *preservation* of holy and righteous beings; and they have no ground of preservation except in sovereign favour: for the most exalted and blessed in the rectoral system, if they had not more than their due, would soon manifest their defectibility. But the proper object of mercy is a creature in misery; and that of *recovery* from a state of sin, with which misery or suffering is connected, is *redemption*, which necessarily implies a plan of mercy. We answer, secondly, it was *good*, and an eminent display of goodness, to promote the happiness of a ruined creature, according to a sovereign but indisputably wise prerogative. But how could this be, without a plan of redemption, by which justice and mercy might co-operate, and mutually illustrate each other? In vain do we look for a solution of the difficulty to the sinner himself, and in vain do we expect relief from Equity alone; but mercy, wise and sovereign mercy, solves the problem, and unties the knot. By the intervention of mercy, exercised in the scheme of redemption, as revealed in the gospel, the divine perfections are made to harmonize in raising sinners from guilt to righteousness, from

sin to holiness, and from earth to heaven.  
 ‘ Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!’

From what has been advanced, it appears, that the glorious disclosure of redeeming grace, is a *higher end* than the display of *Equity*; the latter being a subordinate means of the former. Equity might have been displayed without mercy, as in the case of the fallen angels; but mercy could not have been displayed without the previous exercise of Equity. We may then conclude, that the *ultimate end* of divine Sovereignty with regard to the moral system of mankind is, THE GLORY OF REDEEMING GRACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, in the salvation of God’s chosen. To this glorious end every thing in the moral system seems harmoniously to co-operate, the substitution of the Saviour, the selection of a people, divine revelation, the preaching of the gospel, ordinances of worship, and the influences of the Spirit. ‘ Blessed be  
 ‘ the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 ‘ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings  
 ‘ in heavenly places *in Christ*: according as he  
 ‘ hath chosen us *in him*, before the foundation of  
 ‘ the world, that we should be holy and without  
 ‘ blame before him in love: having predestinated  
 ‘ us to the adoption of children *by Jesus Christ*  
 ‘ to himself, according to the good pleasure of  
 ‘ his will, *to the praise of the glory of his grace,*



‘ wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved : in whom we have *redemption through his blood*, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace ; wherein he hath abounded toward us, in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself : that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him : In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will ; that we should be *to the praise of his glory*.\* This is not the language of human rhetoric, but of divine inspiration, which disdains to be directed by the fastidious rules of mortals.

The attentive reader will observe, that our enquiry hitherto has not been, What is the *chief end* of God in forming the great system of the universe, or even in the plan of redeeming grace ? This, I conceive, is not an object of *Sovereignty*, which always implies free pleasure, a *choice*, and an *alternative* ; and in its exercise a preference is given to one thing, or one.

\* Eph. i. 3—12.

conduct, rather than another, by the decision of infallible wisdom. The reasons why I conclude that God's *chief end* is not an object of sovereign choice are the following: first, because Equity requires that the highest value should be set on the greatest worth. God is possessed of infinite worth, and therefore Equity (as contradistinguished from sovereign pleasure) must *necessarily require*, that he should set the highest value on HIMSELF. But to set the highest value on any object to which a plan or system is subservient, is to regard it as the chief end. Consequently, God's *chief end* is HIMSELF; and to suppose any other object *capable* of this distinction, is incompatible with universal Equity and infinite rectitude. Secondly, seeing God *himself* is his chief end, that end cannot be the effect of sovereignty, or be aimed at as an object of discretionary pleasure, any more than the divine existence can be an effect of it. But the divine existence is not an *effect* of any kind; it is absolutely eternal, independent, and uncaused. Consequently, God's chief end is not an object of discretionary choice, as if an alternative were possible, but of absolute necessity. And this arises, not from any limitation of wisdom, power, or freedom, but from the unrivalled excellency and glory of his nature.

These considerations, I presume, clearly

establish an important distinction between an *ultimate* and a *chief* end. A few additional remarks, however, may be thought expedient. First, Every chief is also an ultimate end, but every ultimate is not a chief end. What God *ultimately* aimed at in the human system of moral government, as before proved, was ‘ the ‘ praise of redeeming grace,\* and what he *chiefly* aimed at was *himself*, in the displays of his equity, and especially of his mercy. What is *chief*, in reference to the divine conduct, is determined by *rectitude*, or universal equity; but what is not the chief, though an *ultimate* end, is determined by *wisdom*, which is no less diversified in its exercise, than are the possible plans in all-sufficiency. Secondly, God’s will, in reference to his chief end, allowing no alternative, can admit of only approbation or acquiescence. For in this way alone can he exercise his will respecting his existence and rectitude, his unrivalled supremacy and unalienable glory.

From the preceding discussion we may collect, in what manner, and in what instances principally, the divine prerogative of *sovereignty* was exercised in appointing the *ultimate end* of our moral system,—the praise of glorious grace in the salvation of the mystical body of Christ.

\* Isa. lx. 21. lxi. 3. Jer. xiii. 11. 2 Thess. i. 10—12. Phil. i. 10, 11. 1 Pet. iv. 11. 1 Cor. vi. 20. x. 30.

First, the ultimate end *might* have been a display of creating and preserving goodness, in the continued happiness of the whole system, if we regard the mere *possibility* of the case, abstracted from the considerations of Wisdom, Equity, and Mercy. But Sovereignty, infinitely wise and good, determined to manifest the divine perfections of Equity and Mercy, rather than mere supporting grace : The one perfection, by *permitting* man to fall ; the other, by *raising* many when fallen, and crowning them with permanent glory. Secondly, the ultimate end *might* have been a display of mere equity in the total and final ruin of the system ; that is, the case was not only possible, but perfectly *equitable*, if we regard the objects themselves, and exclude the consideration of wisdom, grace, and mercy. But by a sovereign plan of recovering grace, there is ‘glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.’ God has a tribute of eternal praise for his undeserved mercy, from fallen but redeemed sinners, while these have an everlasting portion of uninterrupted happiness. Thirdly, the ultimate end *might* have been greatly different in respect of the *numbers*, and the identical *persons* who will be eventually saved. For no one had a claim in equity that he should be qualified for, and introduced to heavenly enjoyments. ‘Not by works of righteousness which we have done,

‘but according to his mercy he saved us, by the  
‘washing of regeneration and the renewing of  
‘the Holy Ghost.’—‘Giving thanks unto the  
‘Father who hath made us meet to be partakers  
‘of the inheritance of the saints in light: who  
‘hath delivered us from the power of darkness,  
‘and hath translated us into the kingdom of his  
‘dear Son.’

If the enquiry be further made, Why are *these* and not *others* ‘endowed with so great a  
‘benefit;’ why is *this* number and not a *greater*,  
made meet to inherit the kingdom prepared from  
the foundation of the world? No answer can be  
given, but that *sovereign pleasure*, under the  
influence of infallible wisdom, though to us  
unfathomable, has ordered all things well. ‘Even  
‘so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.’  
Sovereignty says, ‘I will have mercy on whom  
‘I will have mercy, and I will have compassion  
‘on whom I will have compassion.’—The plan  
was *wisely* formed,—if some are more favoured  
than others, none are injured. Well may we  
exclaim on the brink of this ocean, ‘O the  
‘depth of the riches both of the wisdom and  
‘knowledge of God! how unsearchable are  
‘his judgments, and his ways past finding out!  
‘For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or  
‘who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath  
‘first given to him, and it shall be recompensed



‘ to him again? For of him, and through him,  
 ‘ and to him are all things; to whom be glory  
 ‘ for ever. Amen.’

It was observed at the beginning of the present discussion, that every system may be considered under the twofold notion of *end* and *means*. We have already considered the moral system in reference to an ULTIMATE END, and the exercise of sovereignty in the choice of it; let us now proceed to consider the same sublime prerogative with regard to the MEANS adopted for accomplishing that end. We are apparently assured by the highest authority, and arguments have been adduced to prove that we do not mistake its meaning, that the ultimate end to which the whole system is destined and directed to move, is ‘ The glory of redeeming grace ‘ through Jesus Christ, in the salvation of ‘ chosen sinners.’ But by what *means* is this to be effected? Redemption and salvation imply a *fallen state*, and such undoubtedly is the actual state of all mankind. ‘ All are gone out of the ‘ way,’ (i. e. the way of holiness and righteousness, truth and rectitude). ‘ All the world is ‘ become guilty before God.’ But a provision of *means* of recovery, by a concerted method, before offenders had existence, implied a *certainty* of their future fall into a lost condition. If the

event was *uncertain*, where would be the wisdom or the need of a redeeming plan prior to the event? And if the agent was free from compulsion and restraint—especially if made ‘upright,’ or ‘created in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness,’—how was his fall so infallibly *certain*, as to afford a sufficient ground for the antecedent appointment of a plan of redemption, the ultimate *end* of which must have been fixed prior to the *means* of its accomplishment? Is it conceivable, that certainty can be founded on uncertainty? Here, then, is a divine *prescience*, without a divine *causation* of the event; the former is necessary for the *formation* of a system of end and means, which is accomplished by a progressive series of events, the latter can no more take place than infinite holiness can oppose itself. In short, if the fall and crimes of men were not foreseen as *certain*, there could have been no ultimate end, such as we have proved to exist, or means adopted to attain it. If sovereignty be supposed to appoint, or any way to *cause* the introduction of sin, or the criminality of actions, rectitude would be no rectitude, and sin would be no sin; the folly of scepticism and the madness of atheism would find an excuse at least in theory, though the sting of a guilty conscience would still remain.—Taking these considerations into

the account, we conclude, according to the strictest rules of ratiocination, and in perfect harmony with revealed truth,

I. That God resolved, for a time, as one instance of sovereignty in the use of means, to conduct himself towards our moral system in *strict equity*, whereby an innocent *occasion* would be given for the *cause* of defectibility to shew itself, and for sovereign mercy to be exercised in redemption and salvation. This is the great point, and to which all other difficulties on the subject are reducible, viz. Was any thing more, on the part of God, requisite to be done, in order to foresee the defection of men as infallibly *certain*, beside conducting himself in *strict equity* towards them in their free agency? And it is replied, on the firmest ground, that nothing more was necessary, in addition to the support of their being, capacities, and moral means, all which in themselves are good things, the effects of his bounty and favour. Can any thing be more evident, on the one hand, than that the *cause* of defectibility, and of defection, is in the free agent himself, as what is essentially related to a created nature; and, on the other hand, that the goodness, the holy and virtuous character of every free act is from divine sovereign bounty, as contradistinguished from Equity? Are not these positions capable of the

strictest demonstration? How then can the consequence be avoided, that a human action which is destitute of goodness, holiness and virtue, has its *cause* in the agent himself, in such a manner as to be neither in nor from God; and that God only affords *occasion* for that cause to shew itself, by *not giving* (a mere *negative* consideration) to the agent what he had *no right* to expect, or could not *equitably* claim?

The supposition that God was *bound* to preserve a free agent from sinning, or not to create him at all, is full of atheistic absurdities. It not only accuses the divine Being of having actually *done* what he *ought not* to have done, or of having *not done* what it *became* him to do; whereby the objector sets up his own wisdom and judgement in opposition to those of the supreme intelligence; but it requires also one of these absurd conditions: first, that God ought not to *do good* by creating intelligent, accountable agents, because it would prove an *occasion*, however innocent, of moral evil. On this principle, he ought not to enact a holy law, because he foreknew that a free agent would transgress it. ‘Where there is no law, there is no transgression.’ But how absurd to require a cessation from doing good—and the enacting of a holy law is doing good—because it may be the occasion of evil! Does this accord with any

right principle, any conceivable rule of propriety, that a good act, law, or conduct, should be avoided, because it *may* or *will* be abused? Another condition equally absurd, required in the objection is, that if a free agent be created at all, he ought either to be made indefectible, or his principle of defectibility ought to be counteracted, by the gift not only of natural ability, but also the *benè velle* itself. The former is absolutely impossible in the nature of things, that is, the nature of God and of a creature; and the latter implies, that God *ought not* to be *strictly just* either to himself or to his creatures, lest this should afford *occasion* to any creature of becoming not strictly conformable to rectitude. In short, it implies, that it is *unequitable* in God not to be so *favourable* as to *prevent* sin. What a contradiction both in terms and in ideas!

Can it be any thing less than secret atheism in the human heart that can require such absurd conditions? To harbour such an objection, is not only unreasonable, and unprofitable, but impious and ruinous. Who under its influence can value the gospel, as exhibiting a remedy against an evil which God *ought* to have prevented? Who, thus minded, can love a law that condemns his crimes, and for the perfect observance of which he is not qualified? What beauty



or glory, or even what equity, can such a jaundiced and envious eye behold in a plan of moral government or a system of recovering grace? Nay, how can such an objector, while under the influence of this prejudice, exercise any devout or virtuous affection towards that supreme Being who has not prevented sin, which it was in his power to prevent, and which the objection absurdly supposes he *ought* to have prevented? Let the unreasonable, the ungrateful, the rebellious mind, tormented with gloomy suspicions, that *will not submit* by faith and love, humility and adoration, gratitude and cheerful obedience, to the Equity of God in *permitting* sin, and to his Sovereignty in *salvation* from it, read his character and his doom in these words: ‘ Then he who had received one talent, ‘ came and said, Lord I knew thee that thou ‘ art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not ‘ sown, and gathering where thou hast not ‘ strawed ; and I was afraid, and went and hid ‘ thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast ‘ what is thine. His lord answered and said ‘ unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, ‘ thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, ‘ and gather where I have not strawed: thou ‘ oughtest therefore to have put my money to ‘ the exchangers, and then at my coming I ‘ should have received mine own with usury (or ‘ interest). Take therefore the talent from him,

‘and give it unto him who hath ten talents.  
 ‘For unto every one that hath (i. e. improves by  
 ‘cheerful diligence) shall be given, and he shall  
 ‘have abundance; but from him that hath not  
 ‘(i. e. improves not by cheerful diligence) shall  
 ‘be taken away, even that which he hath. And  
 ‘cast ye the unprofitable servant into outward  
 ‘darkness; there shall be weeping and gnash-  
 ‘ing of teeth.’\*

Is it not equitable that a proud and murmuring spirit, that disdains to submit to the Equity and Sovereignty of God in their actual exercise,—that opposes the law of the gospel, the government and grace, the character, the perfection and prerogative of Jehovah,—should be *left* to himself? Does he not *deserve* the awful sentence, ‘Let him alone?’ What *right* have such proud complainers to hope that they shall not ‘stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken?’† Let them go to the haughty, but afterward humbled monarch of the East, to learn a lesson of submission and better views of the divine Majesty. ‘And at the end of days I  
 ‘Nebuchadnezzar lift up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto  
 ‘me, and I blessed the Most High, and I  
 ‘praised and honoured him, that liveth for ever,

\* Matt. xxv. 24—30. † Isa. viii. 15; also xxviii. 13.

‘ whose dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
‘ and his kingdom is from generation to gene-  
‘ ration. And all the inhabitants of the earth  
‘ are reputed as nothing; and he doeth accord-  
‘ ing to his will in the army of heaven, and  
‘ among the inhabitants of the earth: and none  
‘ can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest  
‘ thou?—Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and ex-  
‘ tol, and honour the King of heaven, all whose  
‘ works are truth, and his ways judgment, and  
‘ those who walk in pride he is able to abase.\*

II. Another instance of sovereignty in the choice of *means*, in subserviency to the ultimate end established, is the appointment of a *Mediator*. Mankind having deviated from rectitude, their *equitable doom* was the suffering of penal evil proportionate to their defection. The difficulty in the way of pardon, and restoration to righteousness, to holiness and fellowship with God, lay in the *honourable suspension* of the penal consequence. Wisdom fixed on a *mediatorial* plan. By this method, due regard was paid to law and justice, and their glory was effectually secured. Hereby God would declare his righteousness, that he would be just, while the justifier of apostate creatures. If consistently with the rules of moral government any sinner may

\* Dan. iv. 34—37.

be interested in a meritorious Mediator, constituted one in law with him as a Surety, made to partake of a spiritual life, and to submit to terms of reconciliation, the difficulty is removed.

Some have ungratefully urged, under pretence of exalting the divine benevolence, that a meritorious substitute was unnecessary. How unscriptural, how unreasonable the supposition! The advocates of this hypothesis, which represents the inutility of a mediatorial scheme for the purpose of displaying the love of God, must have low notions of the evil of sin, as to its nature and demerit,—of the ‘terrors of the Lord’ by which men are persuaded to be reconciled to him,—of the sanctions of his moral government,—and finally of the nature of forgiveness and benevolence. What is *sin* but opposition to divine holiness? Is this a trifling punctilio? What is the just *demerit* of sin, but the displeasure of him who is opposed by it? While this is the case, ‘though hand join in hand, the wicked ‘shall not go unpunished.’—‘How should a man ‘be just with (or before) God? If he will ‘contend with him, he cannot answer him one of ‘a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in ‘strength: who hath hardened himself against ‘him, and hath prospered?’\* What is law, what

\* Job ix. 2—4.

is moral government, without penal *sanctions*? If these may be dispensed with, irrespectively of any compensation to the honour, the dignity, and the justice of law and government, what meaning can there be in threats, or danger from non-compliance? If it be said that pardon is promised on repentance, I ask, what rational prospect is there of any sinner truly repenting without sovereign grace communicated through a mediatorial channel? And if there be no prospect of the condition being fulfilled by the sinner without sovereign aid, what hope is there left for him? To say that divine assistance may be afforded to a rebel without any reference to the honour of law and government, is to beg the question, and absurdly to convert the most significant sanctions into unmeaning ciphers.

For the sake of argument, let it be supposed that a rebel may be pardoned without a meritorious ransom or a Mediator? Will this alone make him happy? Will benevolence render the impure in heart a fit subject for celestial enjoyments? Impossible. ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’—‘Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.’—‘For our God is a consuming fire.’ It is not a doubtful assertion, that pardon and purity, justification and spiritual renovation, go inseparably together. These, with all other spiritual blessings, are



derived as the effect of being in Christ, as St. Paul states: ‘There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.’ And from him at the same time is ‘the Spirit of life’ which makes the pardoned subject free from the power of sin. Except a person be thus influenced to ‘walk not after the flesh, but after ‘the Spirit,’ to rise from a sensual to a spiritual temper and conduct, a free pardon cannot be supposed to effect his happiness. And how is any sinner to possess this without union to Christ? ‘As the branch cannot bear fruit of ‘itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ‘ye, except ye abide in me.—He that abideth in ‘me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth ‘much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. ‘If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a ‘branch, and is withered; and men gather ‘them, and cast them into the fire and they are ‘burned.’\*

The mediation of Christ is so far from degrading the divine benevolence, that nothing can be conceived more expressive of it. ‘For ‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only ‘begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, ‘should not perish, but have everlasting life.’— ‘God who is rich in mercy for his great love

\* John xv. 4—6.

‘ wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead  
 ‘ in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ  
 ‘ (by grace are ye saved) and hath raised us up  
 ‘ together, and made us sit together in heavenly  
 ‘ places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to  
 ‘ come he might shew the exceeding riches of  
 ‘ his grace, in his kindness towards us, through  
 ‘ Christ Jesus.’\* How expressive are the fol-  
 lowing words of the beloved disciple in proof of  
 our assertion. ‘ In this was manifested the love  
 ‘ of God towards us, because that God sent his  
 ‘ only begotten Son into the world, that we  
 ‘ might live through him. Herein is love, not  
 ‘ that we loved God, but that he loved us, and  
 ‘ sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.’†  
 This love includes benevolence to the law, which  
 is magnified and made honourable; to righteous-  
 ness, which is here declared; and to every  
 divine perfection,—as well as to mankind.  
 Hereby ‘ God commendeth his love toward us,  
 ‘ in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died  
 ‘ for us.’ In this method of God’s redeeming  
 love, according to the riches of his grace, ‘ he  
 ‘ hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and  
 ‘ prudence.’

III. Another instance of Sovereignty in the  
 choice of means, in order to attain the ultimate

\* Eph. ii. 4—7.

† 1 John iv. 9, 10.

end before considered, is a *special discrimination* with respect to the Saviour and the saved. Christ was chosen not only to procure suitable *means* of reconciliation by his obedience to the law, and by offering to the righteous Governor a sacrifice of unlimited worth—a *price* of redemption *sufficient* for all—but he was also appointed to be a *Surety* for the actual salvation of all those who eventually enjoy the privilege. The Messiah, while procuring the means of salvation, appears as the messenger of the Supreme Governor, graciously and mercifully making provision, and proclaiming the remedy provided to all mankind indefinitely, without any restriction of Jew or Gentile, Greek or Barbarian, bond or free. But he acts as the minister of sovereign grace, the Administrator (who, with a glorious peculiarity, is the same as the Testator) of the New Testament, when he raises the dead in sin to a spiritual life, pours holy light into the mind, gives repentance and remission of sin, imparts joy to the troubled heart, and invigorates the soul to continue in well-doing unto the end. The atoning sacrifice offered to justice is the condition *sine qua non* of redemption, the fundamental *means* of salvation; but redemption and salvation themselves are *personal* and actual benefits enjoyed.

The discriminative peculiarity of Christ's

mediation includes the certainty of his applying to individuals those saving benefits which they would have neglected, or refused when offered to them. Thus actual and personal redemption from guilt, sin, and penal suffering in hell, (considered as a merited event,) must proceed from sovereign intention, and therefore the speciality of the Saviour's substitution must originate in sovereign pleasure, in subserviency to an ultimate end. Is not this twofold appointment clearly implied in his own address to his Father in the character of supreme Governor and Benefactor? 'These words spake Jesus, and lift up his eyes 'to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; 'glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify 'thee. As thou hast given him power over *all* 'flesh, that he should give eternal life to *as many* 'as thou hast given him.\*—'All flesh' were given him in one sense, but a limited number in another. In virtue of his meritorious humiliation and death, all mankind are under his power; and, in virtue of his engagement as a Surety, special benefits were to be applied by him to individuals, including grace and salvation,—even 'eternal life.'—'And this is life eternal, that 'they might know thee the only true God, and 'Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.† From these words in their proper connexion it appears,

\* John xvii. 1, 2. † Ver. 3.

that it is a part of Christ's peculiar office to afford *saving knowledge* to those whom the Father gave him, that knowledge which is connected with 'life eternal,' as well as the *means* of it in the way of external revelation and instruction.

Instances of divine *discrimination* in the choice of *means* to attain the ultimate end of the system of redemption, are amazingly various as well as numerous. It would be tedious to enlarge on the introductory apparatus previous to 'the fulness of time,'—on the Saviour's assumption of our nature with all its attendant circumstances,—on the *gifts* he bestows, as the spirit of repentance and faith, the pardon of sins, the imputation of righteousness, and regenerating grace,—on *supports* under trouble, and deliverance from the power of temptation. 'Time would fail' to notice many wonderful instances of conversion contrary to all human probability; how 'persecutors and idolaters, 'fornicators and drunkards, thieves and extortioners,'—have been arrested and subdued by sovereign grace; when examples of sanctity, faithful testimonies, 'words of truth and soberness,' and even astonishing miracles, had failed to convince them. Many such characters have been washed and made white, justified for the



sake of the Lord Jesus, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit as communicated by him, so as to be rendered meet to inherit the celestial kingdom.\*

Contrast these instances with the punctual but self-righteous Pharisees, the Sadducean rationalists, the learned scribes and lawyers, who were left to perish in their proud disdain of sovereign mercy and its appointed Mediator. ‘The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.—And whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.’† While those who boast of their virtue and morality, who depend on their own resources of power and sufficiency, are left desolate; behold others, rescued from the fangs of the strongest habits, the haunts of dissipation and blasphemy, become the humble and holy disciples of Jesus!—On a review of Jehovah’s adorable Sovereignty in his conduct toward his people, we may say to the church with one of old, ‘There is none like the God of Jeshurun who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.

\* See 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

† Matt. xxi. 42, 44.

‘ The eternal God is thy refuge, and under-  
‘ neath are the everlasting arms. Happy art  
‘ thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people  
‘ saved by the Lord!’\*

\* Deut. xxxiii. 26—29.

## CHAP. VII.

## A VIEW OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GRACE.

## SECT. I.

*Of Sovereign Grace, viewed in different Relations.*

MANY controversial differences have subsisted, and now subsist, among several denominations of Christians, occasioned by the want of accurate and settled notions of the nature of divine GRACE. The import of the *term*, in general, is sufficiently plain, as denoting *favour*; but the difficulty, from which arises a difference of opinion, consists in this,—that divine favour is represented in the sacred oracles under several *aspects*, according to different relations and circumstances. By an attentive perusal of the holy scriptures we shall find that the word sometimes denotes an *exhibition* of divine favour, —at other times the *required effect* of that exhibition—and sometimes *divine influence* generating a spiritual principle, or a holy state of mind thus produced. We shall now produce the requisite evidence from the scriptures themselves to which the appeal is made, and from which these distinctions are deduced.

I. Sometimes the term *Grace* denotes divine favour, in the way of *exhibition*, addressed to the understanding, judgment, will and conscience of the moral agent. Thus the *manifestation* of divine love, the benevolent compassion and mercy of God to a perishing world in general, or to some individuals among them;—a *declaration* that with God there is forgiveness of sin, the gift of righteousness, saving power, an ability to deliver from slavery and wrath, and a readiness to bestow everlasting life and glory on terms mercifully proposed and equitably required,—obtain that denomination. This, I think, is decidedly the import of the following expressions: ‘For the *grace* of God that bringeth ‘salvation, hath appeared to all men;’ or, more literally, ‘the *grace* of God that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared:’\* That is, the *gospel* is preached, or appointed to be preached, to all nations and people, according to our Lord’s commission. When the apostle Peter says, ‘This is the true *grace* of God ‘wherein ye stand,’† he evidently means the *gospel*, in which is made a glorious exhibition of divine favour. ‘The word of his *grace*,’‡ is a periphrasis, denoting the same thing.

When St. Paul says, ‘Ye are fallen from

\* Tit. ii, 11.

† 1 Pet. v. 12.

‡ Acts. xx. 32.

‘*Grace*,’ (addressing persons who sought to be justified by the law) he must intend that they had fallen or apostatized from the true evangelical doctrine,—that they had lost a just view of God’s manifested favour to sinful men as the ground of their faith, and the hope of their salvation. When St. Peter observes, that some ‘prophecied of the *grace* that should come unto’ the persons whom he addressed, he afterwards explains his meaning thus,—‘they did minister (that is, instrumentally exhibit) the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the *gospel* unto you.’\* The apostle Jude speaks of some ‘ungodly men, turning the *grace* of our God into lasciviousness.’† The context evidently shews that nothing else can be meant by ‘*grace*’ but the manifestation or declared exhibition of divine favour addressed to men who perversely abused it. Being *ungodly* men, they were *graceless* in the subjective import of the word; and yet they had *grace* of some kind, which they ‘turned into lasciviousness.’ Does not this clearly prove, that the *grace* which *ungodly* men, and subjectively *graceless* men, have and abuse, is the favour of God objectively proposed to them? It would be easy to produce other passages of scripture equally decisive in proof of

\* 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

† Jude, 4.



this acceptation of the term ‘ grace ;’ but these, I presume, are sufficient.

We may, however, make a few observations on this branch of our subject, before we proceed to other acceptations of the word ‘ grace.’ It is observable, that the whole of divine revelation may be considered either as a *testimony*, or as a *proclamation*, and both as *moral means*, addressed to mankind by the King of heaven, as their merciful moral Governor. And,

First, The whole of divine revelation, however diversified, may be considered as a *testimony* from God to men. It testifies, particularly, concerning God himself,—his nature, his perfections, his works, purposes, and dispensations. It testifies concerning man,—his nature, his dependence, his obligations, his apostacy, and his actions, both good and bad, and their consequences. It testifies concerning the world and the church, the present and future state of existence, blessings, and wrath, life and death, heaven and hell. Now every thing thus testified must be considered as addressed to the understanding, the judgment, and the will of man as a free agent, requiring an approbation of what is thus declared to be true and good, and a disapprobation of what is represented as false and evil. But,

Secondly, The whole of the sacred scriptures may be considered as a *proclamation* of the supreme King addressed to men. And the things proclaimed may be comprised under the two ideas of divine favours and equitable requisitions. Regarding man in a state of apostacy and ruin, they proclaim divine love and mercy. The Sovereign of the universe issues a proclamation to the human race while in a perishing condition, which announces forgiveness, righteousness, and grace,—life, strength, and comfort,—in one word, *salvation* from sin and misery. Such favours are implied in many *promises* made to collective bodies and to individuals, in *predictions* concerning the Messiah and his kingdom, in the *invitations* to partake of the good things exhibited, and in all the *preparations* made for the use of those who are invited. And it is obvious that these proclamations of divine favours, provided and proposed, are addressed not only to the understanding and judgment, but also to the *will* of men, as were the testimonies before mentioned. They do indeed convey great instruction; but all moral and divine instruction is intended to operate on the will and affections, and thus to afford suitable means and inducements for compliance, obedience, and consolation.

Again, all divine *laws*, whether moral or

positive,—all *sanctions*, whether rewards or punishments,—all *invitations*, *threats*, and *expos-tulations*,—however diversified, and by whatever means conveyed, imply a *requisition* of obedience. They require the obedience either of faith, of love, of fear, of worship, or of service. Now, it is plain, though the intellectual powers are first and immediately addressed, the will and affections are ultimately aimed at in all these proclamations, both of divine favours and requisitions. A bare *consideration* or contemplation of them is only a part of the implied obligation; and only then is the great end of them profitable to man as an accountable agent, when the active powers of the mind, the will and the affections, are suitably influenced to exert themselves in holy obedience and useful practice.

Thirdly, In whatever light we view the holy records; however analysed, however classed, the whole and each part of the Old and New Testament must be of the nature of *moral means*, which, in some form or in some respects, are addressed to the *will* of the moral agent, in order to assist and induce him to make his accountable elections. Every address, of whatever kind, supposes that he is free in his choice; and every testimony and proclamation of divine *favour* is in fact objective *grace*, and is justly entitled *gospel*, as being glad tidings to sinners. Sovereign favour

lays the foundation; but equitable government demands compliance, and requires the moral agent to build upon it for eternity. This *objective grace* may, eventually, be ungratefully rejected, the divine testimony disregarded or disbelieved, the heavenly proclamation undervalued and slighted; to the feast mercifully and graciously prepared many do not come, though invited, nay 'compelled' to come, by arguments the most conclusive, by promises the most engaging, and by threatenings the most awful. Many 'will not come to Christ that they may 'have life,' will not come to the divine physician for healing, though it be demonstrated to them that their moral disease will involve them in future misery, if they reject the proposed remedy. This view of grace, well considered, will assist us in forming consistent thoughts respecting other acceptations of the term, or other important truths expressed by it.

II. A second acceptation of the word *grace*, as used by the inspired writers, is the *effect* produced by the exhibited favours, before explained, in the minds of real converts. Thus, for example, they represent that Christian disposition which we otherwise express by the term *liberality*. 'See that ye abound in this *grace* also;\*' that

\* 2 Cor. iv. 15. viii. 7.

is, as the connexion shews, see that ye exercise a generous and liberal temper in relieving the necessities of the indigent. And thus an improvement in the *Christian temper* is represented by St. Peter, ‘ But grow in *grace*, and in the ‘ knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus ‘ Christ.’\* When Barnabas came to Antioch, ‘ and had seen the *grace* of God, he was glad;’† that is, when he perceived the appropriate *effects* of evangelical truths, he rejoiced. St. Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, exhorts them to be observant, ‘ lest any man fail of the *grace* ‘ of God;’‡ that is, as he explains his meaning, lest any man fail of, or fall from, a pure, chaste, and self-denying temper.

The holy tempers and exercises of mind to which we have been referring, being no less the fruit of divine influence than of evangelical truth, (as we shall prove in our progress,) it has been always customary in the church to call them *Christian Graces*. For, as love, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance, and the like, are denominated in scripture ‘ the *fruits* of the ‘ Spirit,’ so each is aptly styled a *grace* of the Spirit. Does any one resist persuasions, temptations, and incitements to sin with greater facility? Is he more easily induced to

\* 2 Pet. iii. 18.

† Acts, xi. 23.

‡ Heb. xii. 15.



encounter difficulties in the discharge of known duty, or to forego personal gratification for the good of others? Is he more steady in his aim to bring every power of the soul to harmonize with the will, the plan, the glory of God? Is he more humble, more penitent, more meek, gentle and patient under injuries; more affectionate and zealous in a good cause; more peaceable in his views and deportment; more simply dependent on sovereign favour; trusting and rejoicing in Christ Jesus as the Lord our righteousness, 'having no confidence in the flesh;' 'walking by faith and not by sight,' looking at invisible and eternal realities? Does he grow up towards 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;' setting his affections on things above, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, forgetting the things that are behind, and 'reaching forth to those things which are before?' Then, in any of these or similar instances, he 'grows in *grace*.'

This view of grace, therefore, we should consider as an *effect* not merely of divine influence, but also of revealed truth. *Faith*, for instance, 'cometh by hearing' the divine testimony, or contemplating the divine record. We *love* God supremely, because he is represented, especially in the gospel, as infinitely excellent and lovely. We *fear* him, because of his awful

majesty, his glorious power, and perfect rectitude, made known to us in his works and word. We *believe* the divine testimony, because God ‘that cannot lie,’ deceive, or do wrong, and whose authority is equitable, is he who testifies. We *hope* to enjoy future good things, because the divine word contains the promise of them to certain characters described. Is the true Christian born again, and made a new creature, bearing a resemblance to Christ in his views, tempers, and mental exercises, so that ‘old things are passed away,’ and ‘all things are become new?’ This is effected by ‘the word of truth,’ which is an ‘incorruptible seed’ sown in the mind. The new creation, or the new man, is an assemblage of Christian graces, generated and brought forth in the soul by revealed truth in connexion with the indwelling influence of the Holy Spirit.

Hence we find, that the very *same* effect of this nature is ascribed at one time to the *word*, and at another to the *Spirit*; because both are concerned, but in different respects, in producing it. And indeed in this manner most of the Christian graces, individually noticed, are often represented. Thus *faith* is an effect both of revealed truth and of the divine Spirit; for it is said at one time, or in one respect, to come ‘by hearing;’ at another time, to be ‘of the

‘operation of God.’ It implies a *testimony* to be credited, and a divine principle affording a *spiritual view* of that testimony, whence the *effect*, ‘believing,’ is properly ascribed to either of these essential requisites. The same representation is applicable to every other Christian temper or exercise whatever, which may be expressed by the term *Grace*.

Now, as these dispositions and holy tempers are evidently *required* to be exercised by those who enjoy the favours before mentioned,—the glad tidings of salvation, the dispensation of mercy, opportunities for worship, and inducements for the obedience of faith, which are commonly denominated ‘the means of grace,’—there seems to be a great propriety in calling faith, hope, love, joy, fear, patience, meekness, long-suffering, zeal, and the like, *REQUIRED GRACES*. For when it is said, ‘*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ,’—‘let Israel *hope* in the Lord,’—‘thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God,’—‘*rejoice* evermore,’—‘O be *joyful* in the Lord,’—‘let him be your *fear*, and let him be your dread;’—these, and all other holy tempers in exercise, which divine manifestations of truth have a moral *tendency* to excite, are equitably *required* by the supreme Governor. And to question whether *all*, or only *some* of those to whom the word of truth and salvation is sent,

are required to repent, believe, and obey, or to be ‘holy in all manner of conversation,’—is the same thing as to question whether *all*, or only *some* of those who hear the gospel testimony, are the subjects of God’s moral government. What is required is only that effect, or those fruits, which the representations made in the word of God have a *genuine tendency* to produce in any mind which is not in a criminal state either of indifference or disaffection. Let the mind be in a right state, or what it *ought* to be, and the required effect will follow.

But here it should be observed, if God were obliged either in goodness, in equity, in faithfulness to his engagements, or in any respect whatever, to make the mind what it ought to be, required grace would be as universally exercised as the gospel is proclaimed. But this is not only contrary to fact, but also contrary to reason, to conscience, and to the notion of accountability and moral government. No one would or could then ‘fail of the grace of God’ as to any temper or duty. Nay, if God were bound in justice, in honour, or in favour, to give and maintain a right mind, in order to secure the accountable agent from transgression, sinning would be impossible, contrary to every rational idea of his moral freedom. We may justly conclude, therefore, that the tempers and exercises above

mentioned are fairly required by the moral Governor, independently of the actual state of the mind, because divine truth proposed is an adequate moral cause to produce the required effect where the disposition is not criminal.

The terms by which these important distinctions are expressed, are of little moment, provided the ideas are accurately conveyed by them. Were any to prefer, when speaking of those graces which are equitably required to be exercised, the use of the term *reflected* graces, the distinction would be sufficiently preserved, and not improperly expressed. As we are obliged, on account of the poverty of language, to convey moral ideas in the way of allusion and analogy, we may compare objective grace, or moral means, to rays of light, which are either lost, or else *reflected* according to the quality of the subject on which they fall. And indeed, if we would maintain a still more accurate discrimination of thought, both terms, *required* and *reflected*, might be conveniently and instructively used; the former having a reference to the just *demand* of the moral Governor, and the latter to the *obligation* of the moral agent. What is *required* is a suitable improvement or proper use of the beams of instruction, love, and mercy, which a gracious Governor dispenses by his revealed word; and the obedient subjects *reflect*



these beams by shewing themselves to be a 'chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people;' and thus they 'shew forth the praises (or virtues) of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.' But alas! how often 'the light shineth in darkness, but the darkness comprehendeth it not.' Notorious facts prove that claims and obedience are far from being commensurate. 'Whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear;' whether the light of proclaimed mercy and truth be lost upon them, or suitably reflected by holy graces exercised; in a word, whether obedience or disobedience mark their character,—the requisition is inflexibly and most justly the same.

III. Sometimes the sacred oracles intend by the term 'Grace,' divine influence generating a spiritual principle, or a holy state of mind thus generated or produced. In different connexions it designates either the agency of God, or a quality of the human mind. But, under this head, it will not be necessary to notice the exact difference in the passages I shall quote, which are intended only to prove an acceptation of the term essentially different from that in the preceding citations; and denoting an influence whereby free agents are effectually disposed, and determined to a virtuous choice and con-

duct; enabled to know and love God; to believe the gospel and repent of sin; to receive the blessings offered, to trust in Christ as the only Saviour of sinners, to ‘delight in the law of God’ after the inward man,’ and to serve him in righteousness and true holiness. When the Psalmist says, ‘The Lord will give *grace* and ‘glory,’\* what can he mean, but that God bestows by his holy influence a new nature or a divine principle whereby the soul is prepared and qualified for future happiness? He evidently means a benefit or blessing with which glory is connected; but grace as an exhibited favour in the promises is by no means possessed of that character. Many have grace held forth in the word, who are graceless in heart, and therefore shall not have glory. When the apostle James, after Solomon, says, ‘But he ‘giveth more *grace*,—God resisteth the proud, ‘but *giveth grace* unto the humble;’† what can he design but a divine influence on the mind producing ‘the fruit of righteousness?’ Grace, as held forth in the gospel, he sendeth to the proud, as well as to the humble, and *giveth* in the way of offer; but the humble soul is enriched with grace of a different kind.

The prophet Zechariah must be understood

\* Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

† Jam. iv. 6. Prov. iii. 34.

to convey the same idea in the following passage: ‘ And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of *grace* and of supplications:’\* that is, a gracious influence of the Holy Spirit in virtue of which the subjects of it would pour forth supplications and prayers acceptable to God. The scriptures appear full of this important sentiment. What other interpretation can be fairly put upon the following passages? ‘ Out of his fulness have all we received, and *grace for grace* ;’† that is, one degree of holy influence after another. ‘ He said, My *grace* is sufficient for thee ;’‡ that is, the divine assistance that I will communicate. ‘ But to every one of us is given *grace*, according to the measure of the gift of Christ.’§ Grace as exhibited and testified of in the gospel was given to each of the persons mentioned in the same measure, as admitting of neither more nor less ; that grace therefore which was given ‘ according to the measure of the gift of Christ,’ must be of a different kind ; even a spiritual influence. The following texts require no comment. ‘ Grace be with thee’—‘ be strong in the *grace* that is in Christ Jesus.’§ ‘ I laboured more abundantly than they all ; yet not I, but the *grace*

\* Zech. xii. 10.

+ John i. 16.

‡ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

|| Eph. iv. 7.

§ 1 Tim. vi. 21. 2 Tim. ii. 1.

‘ of God which was with me.’\* ‘ By the *grace* of God we had our conversation in the world.’† In brief, this appears to be the import of those concluding short prayers in the apostolic writings which correspond to our Saviour’s direction to pray for the Holy Spirit: ‘ The *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,—be with your spirit,—be with you all,’

The same idea is conveyed in many *other* forms of expression, in both the Old and New Testament. What else can the Psalmist mean by these expressions? ‘ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me—uphold me with thy free Spirit.’‡ Or Isaiah in these words? ‘ Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high.’§ Is not this the doctrine of our blessed Lord and Saviour in the following language? ‘ Except a man be born—of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit.—So is every one that is born of the Spirit.’§ St. Paul, when speaking of his own experience, and addressing his fellow Christians, observes: ‘ The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law

\* 1 Cor. xv. 10.

† 2 Cor. i. 12.

‡ Psal. li. 10, 12.

§ Isa. xxxii. 15. § John iii. 5, 6, 8.

‘ of sin and death.—Ye are not in the flesh but  
‘ in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God  
‘ dwell in you. Now if any man have not the  
‘ Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.—But if the  
‘ Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the  
‘ dead, dwell in you; he that raised up Jesus  
‘ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal  
‘ bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.—If  
‘ ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of  
‘ the body, ye shall live.—The Spirit also helpeth  
‘ our infirmities.\* Again, ‘ Now we have re-  
‘ ceived, not the spirit of the world, but the  
‘ Spirit which is of God; that we might know  
‘ the things that are freely given to us of God.’†  
If these texts of inspiration, with others of the  
same import with which the scriptures abound,  
do not prove the fact asserted, that is, direct  
influence, it behoves the rejecters of the doc-  
trine to give a fair, unconstrained interpretation  
of them as importing something different. But  
this, I presume, cannot be done, while sound  
criticism exists, or vital religion is accurately  
understood.

From these representations, especially where  
the term Grace is used, what less can be inferred,  
than an acceptance perfectly different from the  
acceptations under the two preceding heads?

\* Rom. viii. 2, 9—13.

† 1 Cor. ii. 12.



The idea implied is not, cannot be, *divine favour* objectively exhibited, as *offered* to the choice of man, after the manner of a testimony or a proclamation. Nor is it the fruit or *effect* of truth, before explained, as what is equitably required by the supreme Governor, and is in every obedient subject experienced and exercised. To see the force of this conclusion, nothing more is necessary than a mind free from prejudice, and disposed to leave the scriptures to speak for themselves, without far-fetched and distorted comments. The plain and genuine import of the above cited passages, is an internal operation of the Holy Spirit, changing, renewing, regenerating, quickening, and transforming our souls; in a word, SUBJECTIVE grace, the nature of which is distinguishable from every other sense of the term.

But, as clear views of this branch of the general subject, sovereign grace, are of the highest importance, having an extensive influence on many other parts of scriptural doctrine, a few additional remarks may be useful. The *first* acceptation of grace denotes divine favour *towards* the moral agent, resembling an invitation sent to him, and supported by persuasion, to partake of a provided bounty. The *second* acceptation of the term resembles actual compliance and participation, on the part of those

who are willing and obedient, while the same invitation is disregarded by others, or they have excuses to make. It is a voluntary compliance *from* the agent, who, being willing and obedient, ‘eats the good of the land,’—‘eats in plenty, and is satisfied, and praises the name of the Lord his God.’ The *third* acceptance of grace resembles a penetrating, pervading, illuminating, purifying, and transforming influence of the Sun of righteousness, whereby the heart becomes well disposed, ‘good and honest;’ the will becomes virtuously engaged, refusing the evil and choosing the good; and all the faculties of the soul and members of the body become ‘instruments of righteousness unto holiness.’—Hence it is obvious, as general conclusions on the subject,

First, That grace displayed in the word, though *sovereign* in its origin, compared with the unworthiness of its objects, is only the benevolence of God in exercise, in relation to the plan and order of *moral government*. It regards men as moral agents, with freedom of will to accept or to reject it; and therefore can be of no other nature but that of *moral means*, in the manner of a proposal. The excellency of the *objects* proposed,—as God himself and his infinite perfections,—Christ in his person and work,—the Holy Spirit and all his riches of merciful

influence, when only announced, and proposed to the intellectual and active powers of men, can be considered in no other light but as grace in the signification of *means*. For however free and sincere the proposal on the part of God, and however full and rich the display of truth and blessings, these will not profit if not ‘mixed with faith in them that hear.’

Secondly, We may again remark, that the grace which is merely *objective* is properly and exclusively a *moral* cause; that is, a cause whose effect depends on the manner in which it is received or rejected, improved or abused. For though it has a *moral tendency* of the best kind, it may prove, through the fault of the free agent, useless or even destructive. The very same ‘grace of God that bringeth salvation,’ proves to one ‘the wisdom and power of God,’ to another ‘a stumbling-block and foolishness;’ to one a moral cause of life, and to another an occasion of death and destruction,—as the heart is lowly and virtuous, or proud and depraved. It is a seed sown; if it falls into good ground, it brings forth acceptable fruit, but if upon the trodden path or the stony places of unrenewed minds, it fails of success.

Thirdly, The grace which consists in the Holy Spirit’s immediate energy, is a *physical*

cause; that is, a cause which produces its appropriate effects without depending on the intellect, the will, or the moral agency of the subject. This has been sometimes called a *moral* cause; but very improperly, because it is not founded on its relation to moral government, nor does the effect depend on the choice and exertion of the recipient. True Christians are born, ‘not of the will of man, but of God.’—‘For it is God that worketh in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure.’ This grace is not an object of choice, any more than a difference of peculiar natures, and therefore the effect is produced physically. And thus were Adam’s primitive righteousness and holiness produced when created with him. What is thus effected in the soul is a *new* nature, which influences the choice of the agent without disturbing his freedom; because it is the province and an excellency of rational beings to choose according to the influence of their natures respectively. It is also a *divine* nature, which qualifies the soul to ‘exerce itself unto godliness,’ and to act according to righteousness and true holiness. Nor does the idea of *supernatural* or *spiritual*, by which both the cause and its appropriate effect are sometimes denominated, militate against the propriety of the term *physical* being applied to it, in the sense now explained, because those terms are themselves included in this denomi-

nation. Some indeed have, by way of objection, and perhaps others through mistake, confounded physical influence with the production of some distinct, physical faculty of mind; but the divine energy for which I plead implies no such thing; any more than the creating of our first parents, which all must allow to be a physical act, implies that their spiritual life which was effected by it was a physical faculty.

Fourthly, Of these three scriptural ideas expressed by the term Grace, (and to which all others may be reduced,) two of them are used in a plain and proper, and one of them in a figurative sense. The *proper* sense of the word is *favour*; and this is the obvious import of that Grace of God which is proclaimed in the gospel, and also of that which denotes the influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart, whereby it is renovated and qualified for spiritual exercises. But that Grace which denotes holy tempers, holy affections and exercises, in brief, those qualities, which are commonly termed ‘Christian graces,’ is so only in a *figurative* sense, that is, metonymically, in which the name of the cause is given to the effect; for these are only the effects or fruits of divine favours; grace revealed in the word, and grace generated in the heart.

Fifthly, Those effects which are called



Christian Graces, as required of God and exercised by men, are not produced except by the union or joint concurrence of sovereign grace both objective and subjective,—the truth of the word and a holy principle from the Spirit. For, without an objective truth revealed there can be no fear, or love, or hope, or any other Christian temper in exercise, any more than distinct vision without a visible object. And without a gracious principle produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit, revealed truth will not, in fact, produce any spiritual effect, however excellent the moral tendency of that revealed truth. The obligation to comply with what is required, however, arises from the moral tendency of the objects revealed, or exhibited to the mind; and the failure of the effect, as love to God, or faith in Christ, is a failure of what *ought* to be in the subject. Were not this the real state of the case, no one would ever fail of doing what he ought to do,—obligation and the discharge of it by dutiful obedience would be always and necessarily commensurate; which is contrary to fact, and absurd in theory.

Sixthly, From the premises it follows, that what actually determines free will to the choice of real good, and which is properly termed motive, consists of two parts,—an *object* exhibited, and a *principle* infused. Thus, objective

grace constitutes but a part of motive ; for, if it constituted the whole, since the wills of moral agents are equally free in their choice, how could any will fail of being determined to what is good and holy by that objective inducement, the moral tendency of which is the same to all? But incontrovertible experience proves, that the word preached does not profit many of those who hear it ; and the same remark holds true respecting other moral means, as invitations to enjoy privileges, exhortations to duty, warnings against danger, and even miracles. We may therefore conclude, that, however the word ‘motive’ has been often used in common discourse, and even in some philosophical discussions, if we understand by it that which determines or moves the will in its choice, the object, argument, or persuasive address, can constitute but a *part* of it. For why is the same address, the same preaching, the same gospel, to one the means of salvation, and to another an occasion of death and misery? Surely the difference is not in the objective grace, for its language, and exhibitions of truth and goodness, are precisely the same in themselves. The excellency, therefore, of this part of the motive, irrespectively of benevolent influence rendering the mind well disposed, never does secure (though it ought to secure) a happy result, through the depravity and criminal opposition of the agent ; but when

the mind is as it *ought* to be, its volitions will be good amidst the most artful and powerful temptations. In short, if there be no *other* constituent part of motive, beside the objective good proposed, either all wills would be determined alike, or else be determined by no adequate cause; neither of which positions can be maintained.

Nor can it be maintained that the will either of man or of his Maker determines *itself*. The supposition arises from a false notion of the nature of the will, which is only the instrument of power. And to suppose that the will of the blessed God is the *source* of his power, is little better than to suppose it to be also the source of his *nature*, which must appear to minds habituated to estimate the truth of ideas to border upon blasphemy. What! omnipotence and a self-existent nature derived from will! Indeed it is rational to say, that the divine will *acquiesces* with infinite complacency in the divine power and nature, and every perfection of that nature; but how absurd the thought that they *originate* in will! And yet this would be the fact, if the will of God were a *self-determining power*. For, unavoidably, either the will must depend upon the power and nature of Jehovah, or his power and nature must depend upon his will, for there cannot be conceived two original principles of

independence. The truth is, I appeal to every candid enquirer, the divine will, and every other conceivable will, is but the *medium* of power, which power operates according to the *nature* of the agent whose power it is. The uncaused and infinitely perfect nature of Deity, which includes all possible perfection, secures a right direction of power, and a holy use of the will. Nor is there any other security for a virtuous and holy use of the human will, but the same blessed nature, by a participation of its influence, which influence we are encouraged to expect by earnest and importunate prayer.\* To which may be added, that the doctrine of a *direct* influence of the Holy Spirit on the soul, is implied in those very petitions which we are thus taught to present at the footstool of divine mercy.

\* See Matt. vii. 7—11 ; and Luke xi. 5—13.

## SECT. II.

*Of Sovereign Subjective Grace; its peculiar nature, necessity, and importance.*

WE shall now investigate a little more closely, first, the Special Nature of Sovereign Subjective Grace, and, secondly, its necessity and importance, from scripture, from principles of reason, and from analogy.

I. Our first enquiry relates to the *special Nature* of Sovereign Subjective Grace. And here it will be proper to guard against all ambiguity which may arise from the use of terms. For ‘subjective grace’ is liable to be taken to denote either a producing cause, or an effect produced;—an influence from God on the subject, or an inward abiding principle. To both ideas the denomination is applicable, though most properly to the latter.

First, Subjective Grace, under the notion of a *producing cause*, is a holy influence from God. Considered as an Influence, it differs essentially from the two other acceptations of Grace. For that which is objective is only a message from God, in the form of a testimony or proclamation,



which it is left to the choice of the subject to receive or to reject. And that Grace which is required, is not an influence from God to man, but a duty from man to God. This causal influence is an energy, or powerful operation of God on the mind. It is denominated holy, because of the holy *effects* produced by it. For, as it is merely an influence from God, this epithet would not distinguish it from others; since all his operations are holy, as perfectly consistent with the sanctity of his nature. He is 'righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his 'works.' And his energy pervades universal nature, whereby all elements and all principles of every order produce their appropriate effects.

To those who are engaged in analyzing natural substances, and whose attention is directed to chemical affinities and changes, new and astonishing results are continually brought to view; but they do not think themselves justified in rejecting the reality of an effect because they have not a precise idea of the nature of the principle, or of the intimate and often mysterious manner of operation whereby the change is effected. It must be allowed by all reflecting minds that the laws of nature are not independent principles, and that second causes operate only by the energy of the first; but the

*mode* of that operation, however evident the sensible effects, often lies concealed from human scrutiny. On metaphysical and infallible principles, we are sure that every physical phenomenon in the universe is beholden to the power of the omnipresent Deity; and with equal certainty we know, or ought to know, that holiness, in every created subject of it, proceeds from the same source. If the result be a *holy* change, there is a propriety in designating the causal influence by that epithet, notwithstanding the exact modal difference of operation may still remain mysterious. ‘The wind bloweth where  
‘ it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof,  
‘ but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither  
‘ it goeth; so is every one that is born of the  
‘ Spirit.’

Secondly, Subjective Grace, under the notion of an *effect produced*, is a new spiritual nature, a divine, holy principle of true virtue. It is a direct and an immediate effect of sovereign gracious energy, by which it is distinguished from a mere natural difference between one person and another. It is a *new* nature, as what is graciously superinduced, instead of that which was lost by the first apostacy; *spiritual*, not only because it is produced by the operation of the divine Spirit, but also because it resembles him; a *nature*, to distinguish it from a mere physical

faculty or power of the mind. For though the divine influence producing it is properly denominated physical, as contradistinguished from what is moral or suasory, yet the produced effect is not a physical faculty, but a spiritual nature. It is said to be *divine*, because it is the operation of God, not after the manner of effects produced by second causes, but by his immediate energy on the mind. It is also *holy*, not only because it proceeds from a holy source, (for so do all effects in created nature,) but because it renders the subject morally pure. It is called a *principle*, because it operates as a cause of moral purity, and is a source of holy tempers and services; in a word, of *true* virtue. Comparative or partial virtues, at least what are vulgarly so called, may be found without this principle; but that essential virtue which stamps a truly virtuous character, is an effect of this principle. Every one who has it, loves God supremely, and all other beings and qualities for his sake, which no one destitute of it ever did.\*

\* ‘ The Spirit of God is given to the true saints, to dwell  
‘ in them, as his proper and lasting abode; and to influence  
‘ their hearts, as a principle of *new nature*, or as a divine,  
‘ supernatural spring of life and action. The scriptures re-  
‘ present the Holy Spirit, not only as moving, and occasion-  
‘ ally influencing the saints, but as dwelling in them as his

Natural differences are exceedingly various. Some human beings (as well as other species of animals) are fierce, violent, and untractable; others are quiet, calm, and gentle; some are of a quarrelsome, others of a peaceful temper; some are courageous, others timid. These differences, however, are only shades of distinction in the same nature: but subjective grace constitutes another nature. Of this distinction we are furnished with illustrations from every part of the world around us. Thus, for instance, grains of

‘ temple, his proper abode, and everlasting dwelling-place.  
‘ (1 Cor. iii. 16. 2 Cor. vi. 16. John xiv. 16, 17.) And  
‘ he is represented as being so united to the faculties of the  
‘ soul, that he becomes there a principle or spring of a *new*  
‘ *nature* and life.—The sap of the true vine is not only con-  
‘ veyed into them, as the sap of a tree may be conveyed  
‘ into a vessel; but is conveyed as sap is from a tree into one  
‘ of its living branches, where it becomes a *principle* of life.  
‘ The Spirit of God being thus communicated and united to  
‘ the saints, they are from thence properly denominated from  
‘ it, and are called *spiritual*.—The grace which is in the hearts  
‘ of the saints is of the *same nature* with the divine holiness,  
‘ though infinitely less in degree; as the brightness of a dia-  
‘ mond which the sun shines upon, is of the same nature with  
‘ the brightness of the sun, but only that it is as nothing to it  
‘ in degree. Therefore Christ says (John iii. 6.) *That which*  
‘ *is born of the Spirit is spirit*; i. e. The grace that is be-  
‘ gotten in the hearts of the saints, is something of the same  
‘ nature with that Spirit, and so is properly called a *spiritual*  
‘ *nature*.’—EDWARDS on Religious Affections, Works, Vol.  
IV. p. 104, &c.)

wheat may differ among themselves, yet they are of the same nature; but compared with grains of barley, they are of a nature extremely different. One oak may differ from another; but the very nature of a cedar is essentially distinct. Now what constitutes these differences of nature? Why should a cedar differ from an oak, a rose from a lilly, or a myrtle from a thorn? The genial influence of the sun and atmosphere, and even the soil itself, may be the same; and yet the productions put on forms the most diversified. Again, to borrow an instance from animal nature, why should the noble horse differ from the sluggish ox, and both from the timid and woolly sheep, in so many respects, though they breathe the same air, eat the same herbage, and drink at the same spring? The cause must be traced to the sovereign pleasure of the Creator, whatever subordinate theory of explanation be adopted. Be the primordial principles, the laws of attraction and repulsion, the affinities and chemical changes, what they may, the phenomena must be ultimately referred to the will of him who appointed them. ‘God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.’\* How reasonable, therefore, is the conclusion, that real virtue and holiness should be considered as an appointed nature,

\* 1 Cor. xv. 38.



produced by the divine Renovator, as a principle of spiritual and holy life.\*

\* ‘ Other power may make a great alteration in men’s present frames and feelings ; but it is the power of a *Creator* only that can change the *nature*. And no discoveries or illuminations, but those that are divine and supernatural, will have this supernatural effect.—All grace and goodness in the hearts of the saints is entirely from God ; and they are universally and *immediately* dependent on him for it.—He gives his Spirit to be united to the faculties of the soul, and to dwell there *after the manner of a principle of nature* : so that the soul, in being endued with grace, is endued with a *new nature*.—In the soul where Christ savingly *is*, there he *lives*. He does not merely live *without* it, so as violently to actuate it ; but he lives *in* it, so that the soul also is *alive*. Grace in the soul is as much from Christ, as the light in a glass, held out in the sunbeams, is from the sun. But this represents the manner of the communication of grace to the soul, but in part ; because the glass remaining as it was, the *nature* of it not being changed at all, it is as much without any lightness in its nature as ever. But the soul of a saint receives light from the Sun of Righteousness in such a manner that its *nature* is changed, and it becomes properly a luminous thing. Not only does the sun shine in the saints, but they also become little suns, partaking of the nature of the fountain of their light. In this respect, the *manner* of their derivation of light is like that of the lamps in the tabernacle, rather than that of a reflecting glass ; which though they were lit up by fire from heaven, ye thereby became themselves burning, shining things.—Grace is compared to a seed implanted, that not only is *in* the ground, but has *hold* of it ; has *root* there, *grows* there, and is an *abiding principle* of life and nature there.’—EDWARDS ON Religious Affections, Works, Vol. IV. p. 233.

II. Our next enquiry relates to the *necessity* and *importance* of subjective grace. On this part of the subject I shall appeal to scripture, to reason, and to analogy.

First, The Holy Scriptures are abundantly explicit, and therefore decisive, in favour of the position, that divine influence produces in a direct manner, a holy principle in the soul. What less can be meant by the following declarations, among many others? ‘Create in me a ‘clean heart’—‘I will put my Spirit within ‘them’—‘I will pour out upon them the Spirit ‘of grace’—‘Except a man be born of the ‘Spirit’—‘My Father will give his Holy Spirit ‘to them that ask’—‘Who were born of God’—‘He worketh in us to will and to do’—‘The ‘Lord opened the heart of Lydia.’ To transcribe all the passages which tend to confirm this point, would be to swell these pages unnecessarily. What unprejudiced reader would think of ascribing to objective means these operations and effects? Those who deny the direct influence of the Holy Spirit on the mind, in order that the word may produce its appropriate effect, intend, no doubt, to maintain the honour of revealed truth, and the importance of right sentiments; but we should remember, that they do most honour to the holy scriptures who attribute to them that office which infinite wisdom has

appointed for them, and who do not ascribe to them what is inconsistent with their claims. But do they claim the prerogative of ‘opening the eyes of the blind?’ Of ‘taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh?’ Of ‘creating a clean heart, and giving a right spirit?’—Of ‘working in us to will and to do?’—Where are the sacred passages? When they are produced, they may be considered.—Will it be pleaded, that the hypothesis here opposed is more conformable to reason? Then

Secondly, To reason let us appeal. It is acknowledged, that plain scriptural evidence ought to impose humble silence on all conjectural reasonings. But for such evidence, against the preceding view of subjective grace, we look in vain. The only remaining alternative, therefore, is to examine what interpretation of scripture is the most consistent with clear principles. But what can be more inconsistent with just principles of reason, than to suppose that objective means constitute the *whole* of the motive? or that there can be a motive unconnected with the antecedent state of the mind? Yet, one of these unreasonable suppositions is unavoidable, if we maintain, that there is no gracious influence but what is in, or inseparable from the word. What other supposition is conceivable? Not, I presume, that divine influence

itself, as well as the promise of it, is of the nature of objective means. The divine Spirit is not like a sail subject to the will of man, but as a propitious gale which blows 'where it listeth.' It is ours to spread the sail, but not to command the wind; to expand our desires, but not to 'direct the Spirit of the Lord.'—More particularly,

1. If there be no direct sovereign influence, no subjective grace, but what is involved in, or inseparably connected with the verbal testimony, then, no one can be the subject of salvation but he who *understands* that testimony. For of what use is a testimony to him who does not understand the terms or the language in which it is delivered? To him it is no testimony, as to an infant, an idiot, the deaf and dumb, or a child uninstructed through the neglect of the better informed. Is it reasonable to suppose, that the Spirit of the Lord is so absolutely restrained to the testimony, that no one can be possessed of *salvation* without understanding it? But salvation from sin and wrath is inconceivable, except we admit a divine influence and a spiritual regeneration. The inference therefore is unavoidable, that there is a sovereign subjective grace, in some instances, without the word, or else there can be no salvation for infants, idiots, the deaf and dumb, or any human beings

but such as have a verbal testimony conveyed to the understanding. The conclusion is not that all such persons *must* be saved, but, on the principle opposed, that none *can* be saved ; which is a presumptuous limitation of God's mercy, and a degrading reflection on Jesus Christ as the Redeemer, as if he *could* not save any without the use of words ; not to add, how revolting the thought is to Christian feelings.

2. If there be no divine direct influence, none but what is inseparable from the word as its vehicle or instrument, the sentiment must be sought either from revelation, or from the supposition of subjective grace, as before stated, being inconsistent with reason and analogy. Many passages have been produced as direct proofs of our doctrine, and no passage is objected which is not capable of being explained in perfect consistency with those proofs. It follows, therefore, as the opposite interpretations cannot be both true, that the one must be more consistent with the analogy of faith, than the other. Here also we may rest secure, until something plausible be brought on the other side. Nor does it appear that the objectors plead the *reasonableness* of their sentiment, abstracted from divine testimony ; for they do not pretend to establish it by rational principles, or by fair analogy. But we appeal to



both, as well as to direct scripture proofs, in harmony with the whole current of divine revelation.

3. As the sentiment, that the divine testimony *alone* effects a spiritual change in the human mind, is incompatible with the actual depravity of human nature, ascertained both by scripture and universal experience; so the notion that there is no *direct* influence, none but what is dependent upon, or inseparable from a verbal testimony, confounds two modes of divine operation which are, in their own nature, perfectly distinct. What can be plainer, than the fact, that the verbal testimony of scripture is of the nature of moral means, and that such means produce a moral effect according to the moral principle of the agent? ‘Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?’ or, ‘does a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit?’ Every moral agent, unavoidably, must have *some* principle, either good or bad, *prior* to the declaration of the testimony. Is it a good principle? Then it must be such without any concurrence of the word; for, from the supposition, it was in the subject before the verbal testimony was made known to him. Is it a bad principle? Then how comes it to be changed? If by a direct influence, the point in question is given up; but if by the word, a contradiction is involved, that

moral means are not moral means, but some physical influence producing a moral principle. If it be said, that divine influence changes the moral principle *by means* of the word, this involves the same contradiction as before; as it declares a moral mean, the verbal testimony, to be not a moral mean, but a physical operation. It supposes divine influence changing the unalterable truth of things. It ascribes to a moral instrumentality what, in the nature of things, belongs to a physical cause exclusively. On the theory under consideration, if there be any conversion effected, it is a change of the nature of the word into what it was not before, and not the nature of the man, or his moral principle.

The true state of the question is not, whether some great and glorious change be effected in the human mind by means of the divine testimony, for this is confessed on both sides; but whether the Holy Spirit produces, by means of the word, a change of moral principle. And what else is the affirmative of this question, but an assertion, that a moral mean is converted into a physical instrument by the Holy Spirit, in order that it may effect a change of principle, from bad to good; and which *effect* of the word, in the hand of the Spirit, is the *cause* why the word produces that very effect!—Allow a

direct influence,—whether it be simultaneous with the testimony or not, does not affect the question,—and all these absurd consequences are avoided. The fact is, that the two operations, that of the Spirit, and that of the word, are of a character perfectly distinct, however coincident as to time and place. The one is physical, the other moral; the one *in* the subject, the other *towards* him; the one regards him as a passive recipient, the other as a free agent; the one proceeds from God as a sovereign benefactor, the other proceeds from him as a moral governor; the one on the plan of Sovereignty, the other on that of Equity. Divine influence is a physical cause of a moral effect, or of a moral principle, which is a kind of creation; but the operation of the word on the mind, is that of a moral mean, the tendency of which is to produce a moral effect, but which, in reality, is successful or unsuccessful, according to the moral principle, or actual state of the mind when addressed. Where the operation of the divine Spirit produces a holy principle; the sacred word produces, also, the happiest effects; as filial fear, unfeigned faith, supreme love to God, and ‘hope that maketh not ashamed;’ in a word, a body of Christian graces. The very existence of such effects depends on objects revealed; but not so; the existence of a holy principle, which depends, exclusively, on the operation of the Holy Spirit.

If we would form a just estimate of the sentiment now defended, we should be far from regarding it as a point of indifference; for though preachers and writers may be very useful, without forming an accurate judgment on the question, yet the systematic denial of it is not of the same cast. It is a sentiment of radical importance, if we regard its genuine consequences, since from wrong notions of the Spirit's operations, the danger is not small of denying them altogether.

There is reason to believe that many are betrayed into wrong conclusions on this point, from the circumstance of a saving change being manifested, and Christian graces being produced, by means of divine truth. But since the scriptures explicitly teach us, that divine influence is also necessary in order to produce these effects, they hastily infer, that the word is an instrument in the hand of the *Spirit*, as the shortest way to settle the business, without aiming at clear ideas, or caring for accurate discrimination. But were they to take the trouble of reflecting on the subject, (and surely its importance demands this,) they would see, that the word is an instrument in the hand of God only as a moral governor, and that the influence of the Spirit, in the nature of the case, admits of no

instrument. The moral governor operates by instrumental means, and so does the human mind; and of this character is the word of truth in both respects. But a divine agency on the mind is, in scriptural estimation, a sovereign creating act, which admits of no medium of operation. To withhold from it this character, is virtually to deny its existence.

Some indeed have urged the simplicity of the doctrine here controverted. This was also urged by the ancient chemists, when they confined to four or five radical principles the whole material world. But such pretended simplicity is of little worth when confronted by direct evidence to the contrary. Under a similar pretence, and to avoid closer investigation, many have maintained that the will of God is the source of all things and events, good, bad, and indifferent. But of what use is a conjectural simplicity, when overturned by demonstrative evidence? It is justly stated that physical effects are produced by the instrumentality of second causes, according to the present laws of nature. But was creation itself, or any *nature* in the universe, ever produced by the instrumentality of persuasion or any other moral means? Persuasion, indeed, may excite, and elicit a principle in rational natures; but the idea of its giving



existence to the principle or nature so excited and elicited, is incongruous, unsupported by scripture, and revolting to reason.

Thirdly, Having noticed the direct evidence of scripture, and considered the reasonableness of the doctrine, as before stated and explained, let us now view it in the light of analogy, for further illustration. To this mode of illustration the holy scriptures themselves frequently refer us. How often do they represent a holy principle wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God, as a divine *life*? For example, ‘He that hath the Son, hath *life*.’ ‘Alienated from the *life* of God.’ ‘Ye have no *life* in you.’ ‘He shall have the light of *life*.’ ‘To be spiritually minded is *life*.’ ‘The Spirit is *life*, because of righteousness.’ ‘Being heirs together of the grace of *life*.’ ‘The law of the Spirit of *life*.’ The leading idea conveyed by this term, ‘*life*,’ is the *well-being* of any person or thing to which it stands related. In the material world, from which the language of analogy is borrowed, we have different kinds of life, as elementary, vegetative, and animal; and from each we may borrow a striking illustration of the importance of those views of grace which have been advanced, and especially of an inward principle in conjunction with outward means, in order to produce an appropriate effect.

Taking the word 'life' to denote the well-being of a thing, we may say of fire, that it has an *elementary* life; that it is either dead or lively, as well as latent or excited. Thus, for instance, the life of *fire* seems to be the ground of the allusion, when St. Paul exhorts Timothy, (σε ἀναζωπυρεῖν το χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ) 'that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee.\* As if he had said, suffer not the gift that is in thee to grow *dead*, but stir it up that it may be *revived*, and excited to a flame, by exercise and diligence. For this elementary life two things are necessary, the fuel and a principle of fire. Absurd would be the notion that *fuel* would *generate* a flame, or the life of the fire, without a distinct element or principle to kindle it; or, on the other hand, that the element of fire alone would be sufficient to generate a flame or glow, without fuel, which is the (*pabulum ignis*) food or supply of this elementary life. The flame, the glow, the life of the fire, is the product of *both* united. In like manner, two things united are necessary to produce love to God, or any other reflected grace, which are the two constituent parts of a determining motive,—an objective good as the fuel, and a holy principle from sovereign influence as the kindling element. Without these, no 'stirring up' would produce

\* 2 Tim. i. 6.

the effect; but from both united in the soul, may arise the holy flame of love to God and goodness. It is the Christian's business to stir it up in himself and others. 'And let us 'consider (heed, or observe) one another, (εἰς 'παροξυσμὸν ἀγάπης) *for the stirring up, or excitement of love*, and of good works.\* And he who has it not should ask, that he may receive it, and seek, that he may find it; since God has promised to 'give the Holy Spirit to them that 'ask him.'

A similar analogy is observable in *vegetative* life, which is well adapted to illustrate the subject now discussed, and which is frequently employed as the ground of scriptural allusions. Of a good man, it is said, 'He shall be like 'a tree planted by the rivers of water, that 'bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf 'also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth 'shall prosper.† Bad and good characters are thus described by the prophet: 'Cursed be the 'man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh 'his arm, and whose heart departeth from the 'Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the 'desert, and shall not see when good cometh, 'but shall inhabit the parched places in the 'wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

\* Heb. x. 24.

† Psa. i. 3.

‘Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord,  
 ‘and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be  
 ‘as a tree planted by the waters, and that  
 ‘spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall  
 ‘not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall  
 ‘be green, and shall not be careful in the year  
 ‘of drought, neither shall cease from yielding  
 ‘fruit.\* Solomon has the same allusion, when  
 he says, ‘The root of the righteous yieldeth  
 ‘fruit.’† And a greater than Solomon observes,  
 ‘Every plant which my heavenly Father hath  
 ‘not planted, shall be rooted up.’‡ And again,  
 ‘Either make the tree good, and his fruit good;  
 ‘or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit  
 ‘corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.’||  
 Thus also his forerunner: ‘And now also the  
 ‘axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore  
 ‘every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit  
 ‘is hewn down, and cast into the fire.’§ It  
 would be easy to fill many pages of quotations,  
 in which the moral states of men are compared  
 to vegetative life. I shall, however, conclude  
 with only one passage more: ‘Beware of false  
 ‘prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing,  
 ‘but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye  
 ‘shall know them by their fruits: Do men  
 ‘gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

\* Jer. xvii. 5—8.

† Prov. xii. 12.

‡ Matt. xv. 13.

|| Matt. xii. 33.

§ Matt. iii. 10.

‘ Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.\*’

The language of scripture is full of emblematic representations, analogy, and allusions to objects of sense when inculcating moral sentiments; and perhaps no sensible object is so frequently the ground of its figurative language as what relates to vegetation. Hence the frequent occurrence of scenes which include tillage, seed, and harvest; planting, growing, blossoms, and fruit; so many species of trees, vines, fig-trees, cedars, myrtles, thorns, and briars; the root, stock, branches, grafting, &c. Now, we may remark, not more applicable is this beautiful source of figurative language to the political and moral state of a nation, than to the moral and spiritual character of an individual. No one would contend that, because the sun and air *generate* the verdure, bloom, and fruit, therefore there is no distinct *antecedent* principle of vegetation. Nor would a gardener conclude, that because his plant has the vital sap, he need not expose it to the warmth of the sun or the influence of air. The fact is, that the verdure,

\* Matt. vii. 15—20.



the health, and the fruitfulness of the plant, are the result of the vital principle and the genial external influences conjointly. Thus also the soul that is blessed, ‘ whose leaf withereth not, ‘ and which bringeth forth fruit in season,’ has a spiritual nature and life distinct from these effects. And he who gave existence to the plant, and to every plant its own peculiar nature, and he only, can restore either the vegetative life when once lost, or the spiritual life of the human mind. In vain is the dead tree planted in a fruitful soil, and well watered; in vain the salubrious air, the cheering light, and the genial sun: the restoration of life is at the sovereign pleasure of new-creating energy, as well in the moral as in the physical sense. A radical *principle* is not *produced by* those elements which are destined to support and nourish it.

We may find another illustration in the *animal* life. No animal can subsist without food, air, and exercise, more or less; but we cannot infer thence, that these could *generate* the principle of life. This is *presupposed*, and contributes to the existence of the exercised functions, no less than the (*pabulum vitæ*) the means of subsistence. The vital energies are, in reality, the result of both combined. And here the question is not, how one life propagates itself, in virtue of the divine command ‘ Be fruitful

‘and multiply,’ or the appointed course of nature; but how life, when lost, is again restored. When a lamp is extinct, how is it to be lighted? When a plant has lost the vital sap, how is it revived? When a body is dead, (as that of Lazarus, or of Jesus,) how is it reanimated? As to the first, it is not by the accumulation of fuel; as to the second, not by the surrounding elements; and as to the last, not by the exertions of man.

I am aware how a Pelagian divine or philosopher would endeavour to evade this illustration by substituting another. Though the flame is extinguished, he would say, a little vital air will rekindle it; though the plant droops and withers, water will revive it; and though life is apparently gone, it is only a temporary suspension,—the application of warmth and of stimulants will restore it. It is acknowledged, that illustrations are not identical with arguments; comparisons are explanatory of the thing compared. I have therefore no objection to a Pelagian explaining his opinion in this way. He considers the divine life of the soul as *partially* gone; and that it may be recovered merely by the application of *means*, such as education, instruction, moral suasion, and the like. I consider the same life as *totally* gone; and that no moral means, without a sovereign spiritual influence, are adequate to restore it. Which opinion is founded

in truth, is to be sought, not from illustrations, but from scriptural arguments. My design by comparisons, is to explain, rather than to prove.

Sometimes, indeed, the *scriptural* comparison implies a strong proof, and to illustrate is to confirm. For the illustration, in such instances, derives all its pertinency from the implication of argument. Thus, for example, the sacred oracles compare divine influence to a heavenly fire *communicated*: ‘he shall baptise you with the Holy ‘Ghost and with fire.’ If this be not expressive of sovereign influence as the source of apostolic knowledge and actions, perfectly distinct from moral means, or objective exhibitions of truth, what conceivable propriety can there be in the figure? The scripture also compares the soul deprived of divine life, or without vital union to Christ, to a withered branch severed from a tree; and apostates, to trees ‘plucked up by the ‘roots.’ If there be no vital influence communicated from Christ to his real disciples, in a manner totally different from objective truth, what consistent meaning can be put on the figurative language? And when animal life is the ground of comparison, divine influence is represented as ‘quickenning the dead,’ after the likeness of Christ’s resurrection. ‘And you hath ‘he quickened who were dead in trespasses and

‘sins.’ So that the *illustrations* as well as the plainer *testimonies* of scripture, are decidedly in favour of subjective grace and its great importance in real religion.

Another set of analogical illustrations might be borrowed from the animal *senses*, with which the divine records abound. ‘To *open* their *eyes*, ‘and to turn them from darkness to light.’ ‘*Open* thou mine *eyes*, that I may *behold* ‘wondrous things out of thy law.’ ‘In thy ‘light shall we *see* light.’ ‘Then the *eyes* of ‘the blind shall be *opened*.’ ‘To *open* the blind ‘*eyes*.’ ‘The *eyes* of your understanding being ‘*enlightened*.’ ‘Because darkness hath blinded ‘his *eyes*.’ ‘But now mine *eye seeth* thee; ‘wherefore I abhor myself and repent.’ From these and many other passages of holy writ, how manifest is it, that a comparison is instituted between the visive sense and something spiritual. In the figurative allusion three particulars are evidently concerned; an *object* exhibited to view in a suitable medium,—the *eye* that sees,—and the *vision* itself. The vision, it is plain, is the effect of two things united, the object in a suitable medium viewed, and the visive faculty. In this case also the analogy is very striking; the truths of scripture clearly represented are the object,—the renewed understanding is the opened and well formed eye,—

and the spiritual perception is the vision. What can be meant by ‘opening the eyes of the ‘blind,’ but subjective grace enlightening the understanding? ‘God who commanded the ‘light to shine out of darkness hath shined in ‘our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge ‘of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus ‘Christ.’ Illuminating grace removes the moral incapacity of the mind, and then gospel truths are spiritually understood. ‘The natural man’ (being destitute of subjective grace, and his intellect resembling a blind eye) ‘understandeth ‘not the things of the Spirit of God, neither ‘can he know them, because they are spiritually ‘discerned.’

How often in scripture is the sense of *hearing* employed as an illustration of the same subject. ‘He *openeth* also their *ear* to discipline.’ ‘He *wakeneth mine ear* to hear as the learned. ‘The Lord God hath *opened mine ear*, and I was ‘not rebellious.’ As this text relates to the Messiah, what can be designed by the figure but divine influence (which he had without measure) ensuring obedience? ‘Behold their ‘*ear is uncircumcised*.’ ‘Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye *cannot hear ‘my word*.’ In this illustration also three things are implied,—the *sound*, or the sonorous percussion of air,—the well formed *ear*,—and the



actual *hearing*. The sound is not heard if the cause of deafness be not removed; and this is precisely the case in the application of the figure to the moral state of men. The gospel is a 'joyful sound,' but the ungodly do not hear it in a spiritual sense, because deaf, 'uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in ear.' The deaf have ears, and so have the wicked a natural faculty, and the difference lies in the one being excusable for a physical defect, and the other condemnable because the defect is voluntary and therefore criminal.

Were it needful, it would be easy to apply the illustration to all the other animal senses,—tasting, smelling, and feeling. And it is observable that the sacred writings allude to them, as well as to the preceding, in reference to this very subject. The exercise of grace is '*tasting*' 'that the Lord is gracious;' and the allusion would have no pertinency but upon the supposition of a moral faculty corresponding to the natural. The blessings announced in revealed truth are often represented under the emblem of a rich *feast*, 'a great supper,' 'wine on the 'lees well refined,' and provisions adapted to the palate in various forms. But it is manifest that without hunger and thirst, and a palate to relish the provision, as a moral qualification, the soul will not be satisfied. 'Blessed are they

‘that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for  
‘they shall be filled.’ The same distinctions  
may be easily applied to the other animal  
senses, which, in like manner, for the produc-  
tion of the organic effects, require both a sub-  
jective quality of the organ and an appropriate  
object.

It may be proper here to advert to a plausible objection, which, though it has been cursorily noticed, claims an express consideration. ‘If subjective grace be a *nature* absolutely  
‘different from, and independent of our will,  
‘and of the means we can employ, what room  
‘is there for *prayer*, or for an expectation of  
‘obtaining advantage from any of the exercises  
‘of religion?’—I answer, first, where there *is*  
that divine nature in the soul, sacred truth,  
instituted ordinances, and all moral means,  
especially an application to God by prayer, are  
suited to its growth and welfare. Every man  
*ought* to apply to God by prayer; and his moral  
inability is no real excuse for the omission, but  
rather, as it consists in disinclination or aversion,  
is an aggravation of blame. And, secondly,  
prayer is the most *rational* service in which  
apostate man can be engaged, as an expression  
of his dependence on God’s favour and assist-  
ance. The very nature of prayer implies in-  
sufficiency in the suppliant, and all-sufficiency

in God. And the consideration of this new nature being the fruit of sovereign will, rather than at our command, is at once a ground of encouragement that we may obtain it, on compliance with a divine injunction, and a strong reason why we should apply to God for its donation. It is at his free disposal to bestow upon us his Holy Spirit, and he has promised the inestimable favour in the use of appointed means.\* And this is perfectly analogous to his providential conduct. Though success in any undertaking depends on the will of God, yet for us to neglect the means pointed out in the course of providence is most unreasonable; because the accomplishment of his will, however sovereign, does not supersede, but includes our adoption of means. Besides, finally, if there be any force in the objection, it would militate alike against all the decrees of the Most High, and by proving too much would effect nothing. When the Lord declares, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure,’ who can rationally infer, that he assigns no province for action to his dependent creatures?

From what has been advanced in this long section, we may perceive in what sense the commonly received expressions,—‘the word of

\* *Luke xi. 9—13.*

‘ truth is the instrument of conveying grace to  
‘ the soul,’—‘ the Spirit never works without the  
‘ word in renewing the mind,’—are to be consistently understood : and in what sense also those passages of holy writ are to be taken, where a saving change is expressed sometimes without, and at other times in connexion with the word. Spiritual perceptions of revealed truths are, undoubtedly, by means of that word which reveals them ; for every idea implies its appropriate archetype. The thing perceived, however, and the qualification for perceiving it, are not to be confounded. If there be no divine illumination of the mind, in a direct and immediate manner from the ‘ Father of lights,’ whereby it is capacitated to discover and to relish the holiness of truth, the demand is reasonable, From what *other* source is that capacity derived ? Both revelation and philosophy are here silent. If the direct ray from heaven be excluded, the mind remains in its native darkness, though surrounded with the brightest evidence of truth conceivable.

The ‘ new man,’ indeed, consisting of new perceptions, judgments, passions and exercises, is generated by the sovereign will of God in union with the word of truth. And even a divine *nature* in one sense of the term, is produced by the promises in the same way. For

what is the nature of God but LOVE? Now, in order to possess and improve a divine nature, consisting in the exercise of love to God and man, the divine promises must be contemplated and received. By faith we receive, and are transformed by them. The 'glory of the Lord' shines in the gospel objectively, and the believing soul is 'changed into the same image, from 'glory to glory.' But this is effected, not merely by the object contemplated, but also 'by the 'Spirit of the Lord.' And that Spirit dwells, not in the *word*, but in the *mind*. This proposition, 'God is love,' contains a glorious truth; but it is no more perceived, in a *spiritual* manner, without a predisposing illumination, than this or any other proposition can be discovered as true, in a natural manner, without a physical capacity. God, indeed, is seen in his *own* light, as is the solar orb; but the proposition that reveals him is only the *means*, the moral or objective occasion, whereby the perception is excited. And that proposition, however often repeated, or however diversified in phraseology and form, no more conveys to us a spiritual perception of God, without internal illumination qualifying the mind to understand its import, than the bright rays of the sun convey vision to the blind. The light by which we are *enabled* to see the revealed testimony to be a glorious truth, proceeds not from the *declaration*



concerning God, otherwise no person who understands the terms could remain in spiritual darkness. But this is contrary to decided fact.

I make no apology for insisting so much on this point, because it is of radical importance in theology to have consistent notions respecting the operations of the Holy Spirit on the mind, and because erroneous views of it are often perplexing to serious enquirers after truth and duty. This, also, may justify a few additional attempts to explain and illustrate the same subject. Light in the mind, as an operation of the Spirit, is not an irradiation from an objective truth, however luminous in itself, and however bright it may appear to a person qualified to view it; but is a light created *in* the soul. All illumination of the Spirit is an *internal* influence, and not an external emanation soliciting access through the medium of the senses, the brain, the imagination, or the intellect. To deny this statement, is to confound heaven and earth, to identify means and operations, to throw order into confusion, and to set scripture at variance with itself. How beautifully expressive and explicit, on the present subject, are the words of the apostle Paul. ‘ For God, who commanded  
‘ the light to shine out of darkness, hath *shined*  
‘ *in our hearts*, to give the light of the knowledge  
‘ of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus

‘Christ.’\* Here is evidently included, first, the ‘light of God’ shining in the heart; from which, in connexion with its object, there arises, secondly, ‘the light of *knowledge*,’ consisting in a discovery of the glorious perfections of God, displayed in the person and mediation of Jesus Christ.

When Christ says that his ‘words are *spirit* and *life*,’ what consistent meaning can be conveyed by these expressions, but that his words treated of spiritual and living realities, when he spoke of the necessity of ‘eating his flesh and drinking his blood?’ The Jews took umbrage at his words, because they understood them literally; and he corrected their mistake by telling them that there was a spirit and life to which he directed their attention. If they would profit by his discourse, they should understand it spiritually, as representing what was necessary to secure the life or well being of their souls. Where there is a spiritual and living principle in the mind, as the fountain of repentance and faith, the doctrine taught is adapted to nourish it, and to promote its vigour.

Some have represented the entrance of

\* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

revealed truth into the mind by a lighted candle introduced into a dark room, intending by the comparison to exclude all other illumination. But to those who consider the mental darkness of sinners to consist in a want of spiritual capacity to discern the light of objective truth, this representation must appear altogether erroneous. The introduction of light, indeed, will enable those who have good eyes to see both the candle itself and the objects illuminated by it; but what can *this* light do for the blind? It is true, the prophetic word is represented ‘as a ‘light shining in a dark place;’ but sinful and prejudiced men do not perceive it. The testimony of God is ‘a lamp to our feet, and a light ‘to our path;’ but it does not remove blindness, nor has it any adaptation to effect that purpose. Let us, therefore, ascribe to the holy scriptures all the excellency that belongs to them, but guard against rejecting or degrading the operations of the Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration they were given to us, lest we be found ignorantly ‘fighting against God.’ ‘The ‘spirit of man is the candle (or lamp) of the ‘Lord;’\* but who or what lights it for spiritual purposes? The royal Psalmist replies,—‘*Thou wilt light my candle (or lamp); the Lord my ‘God will enlighten my darkness.*’† ‘Open

\* Prov. xx. 27.

† Psa. xviii. 28.

‘ thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous  
‘ things out of thy law.’\* As if he had said,  
There are glorious truths in thy revealed testi-  
monies; but except thou, by thy Holy Spirit,  
unveil mine eyes, and remove my sinful inca-  
pacity, I shall never be able to behold them to  
my spiritual comfort and religious profit.

\* *Psa. cxix. 18.*

## CHAP. VIII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRECEDING VIEWS OF EQUITY AND SOVEREIGNTY, DEDUCED FROM THEIR APPLICABILITY TO THE MOST USEFUL PURPOSES IN RELIGION AND MORALS.

## SECT. I.

*A view of Equity and Sovereignty in reference to a contemplation of the Works of Creation and Providence.*

SENTIMENTS are valuable in proportion as they are applicable to useful purposes; that is, according to their tendency to facilitate the acquisition of important knowledge, or to rouse the dormant energies of our nature to practise those things which we know to be right. Let us, therefore, borrowing the aid of the preceding representations of Equity and Sovereignty, attempt to solve some difficulties which obtrude themselves while contemplating the works of God in Creation and Providence—while cultivating personal religion—while forming our sentiments on controverted subjects in theology—and while investigating the philosophy of morals.

We begin with the works of God, as



displayed in **creation** and providence—an ample volume whose pages are open to all men. Every one, by degrees, however deficient in the powers of reflection, acquires ideas of comparison; and most reflecting minds cannot avoid indulging a wish that they could trace, by a sure clue, the differences of objects and events to their appropriate causes,—particularly, the great and the small, the strong and the weak, the beautiful and the deformed, in creation;—the good and the evil, the virtues and the vices of men, in their individual and associate capacities, as events in providence. It is not my design, nor is it necessary, to enter at large into a discussion of these topics, but to suggest some radical considerations, by way of specimen, in order to assist a contemplative mind in its discursive meditations on the works and ways of the Most High.

I. One of the first things with which the mind is impressed in the assemblage of objects that surround us, is the relative difference of the *great* and the *small*. Man, for instance, compared with the created universe, is an atom; but, compared with a monad, is himself a world. Who can reach, or measure in thought, the utmost extent of this amazing scale! The imagination is lost in wonder when it attempts to approach the extremity at either end. And yet

how much more amazing is the distance between absolute infinity and mere nothing! Between these extremes man is a wonderful medium; but he should admit, that he is more nearly allied, with respect to the quantum of existence, as every creature necessarily must be, to the latter than to the former.

Our present business, however, is not so much to contemplate the difference between the great and the small in relation to each other, among the objects of Creation, as in reference to the divine Equity and Sovereignty. And here we learn, that the smallest creature conceivable—a mere monad—is what it is by sovereign pleasure; for it might not have been at all. When we rise in contemplation to the sum total of *created* existence, we perceive only so many additions made to the scale, as the sole effect of the same sovereign will.

Viewing the scale in the reversed order, that is, descending, we are disposed to enquire, Why is this or the other creature so comparatively small? Why is man less than another creature, or an insect less than a man? Here we learn, it is not so accurate to say, Because it is a sovereign appointment, for this reason, that a negation is not an effect of will. For as every portion of created existence is the produce of

sovereign pleasure, so the want of any given portion, compared with a greater, is of divine Equity; because more was not its due.

These reflections, attended with a due estimate of ourselves, are well adapted to deepen our humility and to exalt our gratitude. Would man contemplate his greatness, his noble endowments and high destination, compared with the inanimate creation, or the brute part of it? Let him exercise gratitude, and offer praise to that sovereign benevolence which has constituted the bountiful difference. Would he reflect on his littleness, his meanness, compared with other men, or with beings of a superior order, of more exalted capacities, or of enjoyments more felicitating? Let him endeavour to be more unfeignedly humble, in the presence of that Being on whom he has no claim for what he has, and much less for what is not conferred upon him.

II. The consideration of the relatively *weak* and *strong* in created objects, claims a similar distinction. The terms are only figuratively applicable to inanimate beings; as to winds and tempests, waves and floods, and all physical causes and effects of every kind. *Strength* expresses power, and the source of it is the Omnipotent, who communicates it to his

creatures in different degrees. *Weakness* is the absence of strength, which, as it is not in God, is not communicable to creatures. Strength is an excellency, weakness a defect. Absolute nothing, is corresponding weakness; and absolute Being, is omnipotence. The intermediate degrees are inconceivably various. In man we behold a medium between a moth and an elephant, a mite and a whale; and, in point of intellect, between a brute and an angel.

But to what shall we ascribe this diversity? Every degree of strength is from sovereign power, which affords to every one the measure he has, from the smallest to the greatest. ‘Let not the strong man, therefore, glory in his strength,’ for ‘what has he that he did not receive?’ And let the strength which he possesses be employed in a voluntary concurrence with the will of the Almighty, which never deviates from perfect rectitude. Are we conscious of weakness and infirmities? Let us not impute them to God, as communicated qualities; for he has neither weakness nor infirmity to communicate. They are, strictly speaking, our *own*. If we ask, Why have we them? The true answer is, Because their contraries are not our due. These qualities, nevertheless, though not communicated, stand related to divine Equity; while the power and the strength which we

have, and which are communicated, are to be ascribed to sovereign goodness. The former calls for humble acquiescence, the latter for grateful praise.

III. The *beauty* and *deformity* of created objects are not mere creatures of the mind, any more than strength and weakness, though not so easily ascertained. There is, in fact, an absolute beauty, from which all others emanate; though there is no absolute deformity, except we identify with it mere nihility, which is scarcely admissible. The first of beings is absolutely beautiful and glorious; and, according to his sovereign will, he distributes beauty of every order in the universe he has wisely formed. And as his beauty and glory consist eminently in his holiness, this quality is the most beautiful of which a creature can partake.

In estimating both moral and natural objects, as to their beauty, we are seldom free from the bias of prejudice and the error of caprice. In extreme cases there is but little hazard of mistake, or liability to a diversity of opinion; whether we survey a human person, an animal form, a vegetable production, mineral substances, or the works of art. But in judging of the intermediate degrees of beauty and deformity, much depends on previous associations in the



mind, and on the assumed rules of estimation. We are also liable to confound what is beautiful with what is convenient, useful, or estimable, though very different considerations. Thus, in personal attachments, there is a complication of objects; beauty of form, of qualities and endowments, or of general character; and according to previous associations, standards of taste, or views of advantage, different persons will draw different conclusions.

Perfect beauty, whether physical or moral, in a creature, is as impossible as perfect greatness, or perfect strength. There can be only different degrees of approximation to the first absolute beauty, whether in the works of nature or in those of art. And deformity, which admits of indefinite degrees, is only the absence of beauty. There is no creature which has not some relative beauty; nor can there be any one which has not some relative deformity. In the works of God, whether of Creation or of Providence, though there is nothing perfectly beautiful, in comparison of the first beauty, the source and standard of all others, yet there is nothing so deformed but it suits its appointed place, and answers its appropriate use. In this respect, of the Creator it is justly and strictly said,—‘his work is perfect.’ But in the works of human art, if we estimate their pretensions by

the designed end, the deformity or defect may be so great, as to exclude all claim to beauty.

When man contemplates himself and the diversified objects with which he is encompassed, he cannot fail to observe innumerable instances of these opposite qualities; and to an investigating mind it is interesting to seek their respective sources. Of the one, what other ultimate source is conceivable, or strictly speaking possible, but divine Sovereignty? When thought ascends to sovereign goodness and wisdom, power, and will, no perplexing question remains upon the subject. From the sovereign Benefactor every species of beauty emanates, to him it returns, and to him every voluntary and reflecting agent ought to ascribe it. And the more enlightened, the more spiritual, the more transformed into the divine similitude the mind is, the more will it be delighted to dwell, in meditation, on the infinite original. ‘For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!’\* While ‘the fashion of this world passeth away,’ how delightful, how felicitating that OBJECT! O that men were wise, that they knew him better! Then would they love him supremely, and serve him with greater cheerfulness: Then would their souls rest in him with unutterable

\* Zech. ix. 17.

complacency; his presence would solace them in every day of trouble, in every night of sorrow. Instead of the fruitless round of enquiry, 'Who will shew us any good?' they would rejoice in him as their endless portion, 'their exceeding great reward.'

On the other hand, would we know the source of deformity? It is the same as that of every other defect. And what can this be but a negative principle, consisting in limitation, or the want of ulterior perfection? The Deity is not its *cause*, but it stands *related* to his Equity; more than they have, whether of being or of beauty, is not their due. It is vulgarly said of a deformed object, 'God has *made* it so.' He, indeed, is the author of its being, its quantum of greatness, or of strength, its modicum of beauty or comely proportion; but its limitation of being, its comparative smallness and weakness, its *want* of comely proportion and beauty, in a word, its deformity, is of *itself*, its essential insufficiency and absolute dependence. The idea is purely negative, with whatever positive terms it may be clothed. It consists in what sovereign wisdom and power, bounty and pleasure, have *not* done to the object; and its limitation, want, or defect, is founded in universal Equity. How profitably humbling the consideration! What a ground of approval, and acquiescence in the

formation and arrangement of all things! ‘In wisdom hast thou made them all,’ exclaims the devout Psalmist; and what can be greater folly in us than to dispute the decisions of wisdom? All the works of God are wisely appointed ‘in number, weight, and measure.’

It is true, every individual creature *might* have been, as to possibility greater, more powerful and more beautiful, because it stands related to Sovereignty and Omnipotence; and the same observation applies to the aggregate, the universe of created beings. And we may conceive it as very possible, that the reverse of these qualities might have predominated to an indefinite degree, when we regard them as related to divine Equity, which apportions to all their due. Now, this very *possibility* of better and worse in created objects, is a demonstrative proof of a negative principle by which they are limited; and, at the same time, an illustrious display of the divine perfections of Equity and Sovereignty.

IV. When we turn our thoughts from the objects of creation to those of *providential* dispensations, one of the first things calculated to arrest our attention, is the mixture of good and evil, of virtue and vice, both in the individual character and in society. Here we behold wealth and poverty, health and sickness, domi-

nion and slavery, peace and war, justice and oppression, truth and falsehood, virtue and vice, happiness and misery, strangely interwoven. Where shall we find a prism to separate, in contemplation, these blended rays? By what means may we be able satisfactorily to refer each quality to its own proper source? To ascribe all indiscriminately to the will of God, is a convenient subterfuge for imbecility or sloth, pride or impatience. On this hypothesis, these attributes themselves must be referred to him; and he would also be the father of deceit and falsehood, the source of folly, envy and malice, the patron of impiety and vice.

Nor is the case relieved by transferring the ultimate causation of defects, and crimes, and miseries, from the will of God to the will of men. For is not God the author of human wills? Are they not momentarily supported by him, and does he not impart to them all their energies? How then can the human will be regarded as the *ultimate* source of crimes and woe, without implicating the Creator? Contemplate two national cabinets, of opposite views, planning a campaign; or two armies dealing destruction on each other as enemies. These deeds flow from the wills of the parties engaged, and these derive all their activity and vigour from that supreme will, without which they



could have neither efficacy nor existence. Here, where the views are so opposite, and the clashing wills produce effects so tremendous, there must be many crimes and much misery. Now, if there were no defects in men, of prior consideration to the exercise of free will, and of which God is not the author, they never would act amiss; or if they did, God would be the ultimate cause of their misdeeds. Those who commit crimes of the greatest magnitude have wills, as effects of divine and sovereign bounty, as well as the most virtuous, and equal freedom on the part of God; but they are *deficient* as to a benevolent disposition, the love of good, a just estimate of consequences, real wisdom and prudence. But is their deficiency the gift of God? Or is their will the cause of that which perverts it? In all unworthy deeds the free wills of men are perverted; but by what? Not, surely, by the Author and supporter of their wills. By what then? It cannot be by free will itself, except we can identify cause and effect. The truth is, that Equity leaves men possessed of all the defects they have, their negative principles and acquired habits; leaves them to walk in their own ways; permits them to plan, and often to execute, their own schemes, in private or in public, in their individual and associate capacities. In Equity they are accountable to the supreme Governor and Judge, while Sovereignty

assigns them natural capacities, and providential means of exercising wisdom, that by real virtue they might obtain happiness. They who imagine they have no deficiencies to be supplied, no wants to be relieved, no sins to be pardoned; who disdain to seek, or to acknowledge the necessity of Sovereign influence as the cause of their success, will have degrading thoughts of a 'throne of grace,' of a Redeemer from sin and misery, of true virtue and religion,—in a word, of divine Equity and Sovereignty. To the neglect of infinite wisdom and promises of assisting grace to those who seek according to a divinely instituted plan, they will choose their *own* way of happiness, and their appropriate reward will be equitably assigned to them.

Amidst all the perplexities and miseries of this world, how consoling the thought, that all the follies and perversities, the wrath and oppressions, the cruelties, injustice, and uncharitableness of men, are under the sovereign restraint and control of the Most High! While the vicious are 'filled with their own devices,' we are assured that 'all things work together for 'good to them that love God.' 'Surely the 'wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder 'of wrath shalt thou restrain.'—'Thine, O 'Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the 'glory, and the victory; and the majesty; for all

' that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine;  
 ' thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art  
 ' exalted as head above all. Both riches and  
 ' honour come of thee, and thou reignest over  
 ' all, and in thine hand is power and might, and  
 ' in thine hand it is to make great, and to give  
 ' strength unto all. Now therefore, our God,  
 ' we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.'  
 The truly pious, though they eat ' the bread of  
 ' adversity,' and drink ' the water of affliction'  
 and oppression, have abundant inducements to  
 ' rejoice evermore.' ' And not only so but we  
 ' *glory* in tribulations also; knowing that tribu-  
 ' lation worketh patience, and patience expe-  
 ' rience, and experience hope, and hope maketh  
 ' not ashamed, because the love of God is shed  
 ' abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which  
 ' is given unto us.' To conclude our present  
 reflections; every created object, every provi-  
 dential event, every defect and excellency, all  
 happiness and misery, are distributed by the  
 hand of either Sovereignty or Equity; our good  
 by the former, our evil of suffering by the latter;  
 —while the evil of sin is of ourselves. With God,  
 however, ' there is forgiveness that he may be  
 ' feared, and with him there is plenteous redemp-  
 ' tion.' Over all the created universe he presides,  
 and governs with indefectible wisdom, and ' his  
 ' tender mercies are over all his works.' — ' The  
 ' Lord God omnipotent reigneth; — Alleluia!'

## SECT. II.

*A view of Equity and Sovereignty in reference to  
Personal Religion.*

EVERY intelligent Christian will allow, that those doctrinal principles which have the most direct tendency to generate and improve personal religion, obviously recommend themselves as important, and highly deserving of a cordial reception. That knowledge, and that consideration of God and of ourselves, which directly tend to excite the believer's holy love, his filial fear, his genuine humility, his absolute resignation, his ardent gratitude, and his lively hope;—that view of God and of ourselves which is best calculated to destroy our enmity, to check our presumption, to subdue our pride, and to control our impatience;—those aspects of the divine character which inflexibly oppose rebellion, forbid despair, and inspire delight;—in a word, those aspects which ward off perplexity, and induce a cheerful and settled confidence, challenge our highest reverence and esteem. In the Christian character, as in the sacred volume, and in the divine dispensations, it is pleasing to recognize a beautiful symmetry, in which every part appears to occupy its proper situation, like the parts of a dissected map, without any thing either prominently deficient or superfluous. Such,

it is apprehended, are the genuine effects of an habitual, devout contemplation of Equity and Sovereignty, as explained in this Essay.

I. *Holy love* is the essence of real virtue, and the sum of Christian holiness. Infinite, sovereign benevolence, habitually contemplated, enkindles the sacred flame: all rising enmity is subdued, and the soul easily embraces with good will even its bitterest enemies. A desire to imitate, from a just view of rectoral benevolence, forbids the contrary. That view of Sovereignty which has been sometimes maintained, which wears a stern aspect, and includes a destructive disposal of its objects, inspires us with dread, rather than with confidential affection. But, to the soul that seeks him, God is an ocean of light and love. The more we dwell on this blessed object, the more are we ‘changed into the same image, from glory to glory.’ Love begets love. ‘We love him, because he first loved us.’ The command to love such a Being with all our heart, is ‘not grievous, but joyous.’ And even his Equity becomes a pleasing theme, and the object of purest love. His very judgments which abound in the world, reflect no dishonour upon him. Though the records of history are full of events which are criminal in themselves, and in their consequences injurious to men; yet the divine Equity is not sullied, but appears to



an impartial eye perfectly and unchangeably amiable. The guilty alone are the objects of divine judgments; and though the ‘heel of the ‘righteous’ may be bruised by them, ‘their life ‘is hid with Christ in God.’

False apprehensions of the divine character perplex and confound; but accurate views discover a loveliness, a spiritual beauty, which words are inadequate to express. Divine benevolence is wonderfully operative, and inconceivably fruitful. The evangelical charter contains grants of amazing import,—‘And this is ‘the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life; and this life is in his Son.’\* ‘I ‘will be their God, and they shall be my people; ‘be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not ‘the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and ‘will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my ‘sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.’† Well may Christians exclaim, ‘What manner of ‘love is this!’ ‘He that spared not his own ‘Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall ‘he not with him also freely give us all things?’ This view of divine benevolence is well adapted to maintain the flame of holy affection; a sovereign God, the infinite source of light, shines in his dispensation of mercy on a benighted

\* 1 John, v. 11. † 2 Cor. vi. 16—18.

world without respect of persons, nor does he place any obstruction in the way by a reprobating decree. The doctrines here taught admit of no appointed bars, no obstacles to be surmounted, in our approach to the God of mercy and love, but our own obstinancy and perverseness, no conceivable hindrance but in ourselves,—nothing but what is properly our *own*, and not in any sense from God. Here we find nothing in divine Sovereignty but what is infinitely amiable and lovely; nor is divine Equity an enemy to any one but the wicked and rebellious. Who but the ignorant and the vicious will fail to love a character so infinitely estimable and attractive?

II. Filial *fear*, which is peculiar to a soul possessed of true piety, consists in an apprehension of power accompanied with benignity. So important is the ‘fear of the Lord,’ in the estimation of the inspired writers, that sometimes the *whole* of real religion is represented by that phrase. Infinite majesty and almighty power, viewed as detached from love, may well produce gloomy dread, or a ‘fear that hath torment;’ but sovereign benevolence, united with awful power and equity, and seen through the medium of revealed truth, expel the slavishness of fear, and generate a reverential and filial affection. If in any case we should conceive of sovereign power, as of something which differs arbitrarily from supreme Equity, rectitude

and holiness, we could never be free from slavish fear, and 'a horror of great darkness' would interrupt our purest enjoyments. False associations tarnish the lustre of religion, and corrode our happiness. But if, in fact, our spiritual enjoyments are interrupted, notwithstanding we have right views of the divine character, we may be sure that then Equity, not Sovereignty, is operative, and that we suffer nothing more than we deserve. Then is the time for us to enquire, with trembling solicitude, What are we, and what have we done? Then, also, is the time for us to meditate with contrition on the fountain of mercy, the testimonies of God respecting his readiness to forgive the penitent, and the sins which ought to be avoided. Then, moreover, is the time for us to betake ourselves, in the exercise of 'repentance towards God and faith 'in our Lord Jesus Christ,' to the 'fountain 'opened for sin and for uncleanness;' to seek, with all seriousness and earnestness of soul, 'mercy to pardon and grace to help.' Now, we dare not appeal to justice; 'if thou, Lord, 'shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall 'stand.' The only remaining refuge is sovereign mercy. 'But with thee there is forgiveness 'that thou mayest be *feared*.' Now we are again prepared for watchfulness against temptations to sin, for diligent and cheerful obedience. The burden of guilt is removed, faith having

‘received the atonement;’ the defiled conscience is purified by ‘the blood of the covenant;’ ‘being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,’ and ‘walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.’ Thus the principle of holy action is purified and invigorated: ‘when thou hast enlarged my heart, I will run in the ways of thy commandments.’

Now, it is demanded, what theological principles, except those maintained in this Essay, are calculated to favour this process, or to produce this happy result? How can filial fear, or a worship truly reverential, be promoted by any adverse principles? Let the advocates of the paramount potency of reason, to the exclusion of these doctrines, go to any extent they wish; what can they acquire, what end can they accomplish? Can the cultivation of reason, to the neglect of a sovereign remedy, remove guilt from the conscience? Hardened it may be, but not cleansed; it may be perverted for the admission of a false peace, but not pacified on grounds that will bear examination. Pharisaic pride and Sadducean obstinacy may be easily acquired, with a delusive confidence; but that ‘fear of the Lord which is clean, enduring for ever,’ is not to be obtained by that boasted reason which expunges from our creed the

Equity of divine government and the Sovereignty of divine grace. They who are so minded and resolved will rush on the perilous experiment; and they shall ‘reap the fruit of ‘their doings.’ ‘Behold all ye that kindle a ‘fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: ‘walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks ‘that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of ‘mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.’\* Blessed are they who, awakened to self-enquiry, diligently seeking the cause of their ignorance and guilt, and finding it in themselves, mourn and lament; who flee to the refuge graciously provided in the gospel, who sincerely desire to avoid not only presumptuous sins, but also secret faults, and who exercise filial fear towards God. But how can this be conceived as possible, without a proper acquaintance with our own real state as related to him, and with his true character as revealed in his word?—a God, whose justice will ‘by no means clear the ‘guilty,’ and whose mercy is to be sought by the way which his wisdom has prescribed.

III. Genuine *humility*, which is absolutely essential to personal religion, consists in a just sense entertained of ourselves, considered as unworthy and dependent, compared with God.

\* Isa. i. 11.



As repentance arises from a due consideration of our sinfulness, contrasted with the holiness of God and the perfection of his law; so humility springs from a just comparison of ourselves, considered as creatures, with the self-existent, independent, immutable, and all-sufficient God. The essence, existence, and perfections of Jehovah, are uncaused and strictly absolute. No other being can possibly be so. He has neither beginning nor end; neither actual change, nor a liability to variation. On the contrary, we are dependent upon God for every good quality, every moral excellence, every active power, for our existence, and even our very essence. Without him, we had no *possibility* of existence. He is the sole cause, not only why we are, but also why it was possible for us to be. In him alone are all our springs and resources of sufficiency; and abstracted from him we are as NOTHING.

Some may hastily conclude, that a proper sense of our delinquency, our sinfulness and obnoxiousness to punishment, is an essential ingredient as well as an occasion of humility. But this is contrary to acknowledged facts, as well as to the obvious nature of the thing itself. For is it not an allowed fact, that the angels in heaven are as humble as they are holy? Was not humility a robe which perfect Adam wore in

paradise? Was not the spotless Jesus constantly arrayed in it? Yes, and with humility, as a becoming garment, will every creature in the realms of bliss be for ever invested. He who has a deep sense of his original non-existence, his universal and absolute dependence, his constant liableness to revert to his primitive nihility, on the suspension of God's preserving care, is in the same degree humble. But he who imagines he has any degree of goodness, moral or physical, in act or in principle, which is not immediately from God,—who supposes that he has a power of self-preservation in any respect distinct from the operative divine will, is in the same proportion the subject of ignorance and pride.

If we would be disrobed of the worthless, the odious garment of pride, let us contemplate the true character of God compared with our own. In that perfect mirror we may see that there is an infinite disparity between the parties, and that God alone is distinctly good. We may see also the true temper of the first perfect Adam, and of the second Adam, who was 'meek and lowly in heart;' and there we may behold the profound humility and reverence, together with the consequent unutterable joys of the celestial myriads. The sole cause why they are blessed and happy, is divine, sovereign benevo-

lence; and the great source of their humility is their comparative nothingness in the balance of perfect equity. The objective means, afforded them as free agents, for their preservation in that blissful condition, is a perpetual contemplation of God in his real characters, contrasted with their own; and pleasing wonders, before 'hidden from ages and generations,' continually unfold themselves to their adoring minds.

IV. There is no suitable, no sufficient inducement for absolute *resignation* to the divine will, which yet is essential to personal religion, without a firm conviction that 'God is love,' that is, infinite benevolence; and that his perfection of Sovereignty is (to the absolute exclusion of an arbitrary power to inflict misery) a right of displaying and conferring that benevolence in one way, or in one degree, rather than another. When we are thoroughly convinced of this glorious truth, the objective evidence of which is abundant, and that a revelation of it, in a way of mercy, is made to mankind whose condition is deplorable;—when we are assured that offenders on returning will be received with compassionate kindness, and that Jesus Christ will not reject the soul that comes to God through his mediation;—when, moreover, we know from the real nature of divine equity, that it stands opposed to nothing in us but indulged

sin and a rebellious will;—the way appears clear for the most absolute resignation of ourselves to the will of God.

Conscious indulgence of sin, indeed, or voluntary rebellion, will prove an injurious bar; but what can be more equitable? In fact, the supposition of a rebel, continuing such, exercising absolute resignation, is contradictory. But, such is the wonderful, the endearing character of God, and such the harmony of his perfections, the soul which is conscious it has no allowed guile, no fostered aversion, may commit itself without reserve, and without fear, into the arms of infinite benvolence, in undismayed expectation of all the happiness it needs both present and future. To him who regards justice as wearing the aspect of arbitrary severity, or sovereignty as including a power of inflicting misery without desert, however valuable may be his other sentiments, self-dedication will be more a painful task, than a pleasing exercise. But to an enlightened believer no act of devotion is more delightful. By him God is viewed as an almighty Father and friend, who rejects no returning sinner, but ‘loadeth him with ‘benefits.’ For though ‘God shall wound the ‘head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such ‘an one as goeth on still in his trespasses;’ yet the humble believer in Jesus comes boldly, that

is, with resigned confidence, to 'the throne  
'of grace.'

V. *Gratitude* is a temper of mind which denotes a desire of acknowledging the receipt of a benefit. The mind which does not so feel, is not as it ought to be; but one rightly disposed is ardent in gratitude, in proportion to the benefit received. When the apostle Paul says of the Heathen, 'neither were they thankful,' he seems to mark the sin of ingratitude as peculiarly odious. And indeed this was the view which the wiser among themselves professed to take of that vice; without, alas! feeling the conviction that thereby they were self-condemned. But this unworthy temper is not confined to Heathens; on the contrary, how common among professed Christians, and to what an awful extent! What benefactor like God, especially as represented in the Christian system! What benefactor so great, so good, so bountiful, so constant, and so disinterested! But where are the returns of gratitude? How few utter from the heart these words, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.' 'What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me!' Sentiments and feelings no less rational than devout.

Like every other grace which is required of



us, virtuous gratitude depends, in part on a right apprehension and estimate of its appropriate object. A right view of benefits received, of the source whence they flow, and of our own demerit, has a direct tendency to excite our gratitude; and while the mind is virtuously disposed this will be the pleasing effect;—a sacrifice acceptable to the Benefactor, and delightful to him that offers it. Now what views of God have the most direct tendency to excite and cherish gratitude? Not those which regard him as all benevolence, without justice; nor those which represent him all justice, including rectitude and general goodness, without sovereign benevolence. The gratitude of the former, if grateful at all, must be very limited and feeble; for, having no great sense of their own demerit, for want of a standard by which to estimate their condition, one powerful motive to gratitude is neglected. And the tribute of the latter must be equally defective, while they reject the sovereignty with which God confers his benefits; it degenerates into a feeling, if any grateful feelings remain, resembling what they have on partaking of a common boon for which they are not under any peculiar obligation.

The devout Christian, however, under the influence of consistent principles, surveys the

sovereign benevolence of the supreme Benefactor in every person, in every object, in every quality, and in every event. When he views the starry heaven, and beholds how ‘one star differs from another star in glory;’ when he ploughs the mighty waters, and considers how they are peopled, and how astonishing is the scale of animal existence, from the bulky whale to the microscopic animalcule;—when he traverses the mountain and the forest, crosses the field and the meadow, or walks in the lawn and in the garden;—when he visits the city, and observes the commercial, the political, and the military crowd, or mingles with the devout assembly paying the homage of religious adoration,—in all places and circumstances the divine sovereign benevolence forces itself on every sense, and pervades his grateful heart. Nor does the pleasing emotion forsake him when he enters the chambers of poverty and distress, the cell of a guilty prisoner, or the solemn place of execution. Compassion to the suffering classes of mankind does not extinguish, indeed has no tendency to extinguish, the flame of gratitude to that sovereign God who makes one to partake of his benefits more liberally than others; while divine Equity guards, with never-failing exactness and impartiality, every person and every percipient nature, so that not the smallest conceivable

measure of suffering is experienced, which is not their *due* in the strictest sense.

When spiritually minded Christians, whose views are corrected by the genuine doctrines of the holy scriptures, are led to contemplate the world of spirits, future punishments and rewards—the regions of despair, and the mansions of the blessed—they are disposed to say, as ‘the words of truth and soberness,’ Why are we, who are great sinners, not ‘tormented in those flames?’ Why are not we the deathless fuel of consuming fire? Why are not we the prey of a never-dying worm? As our sins have deserved it, why are we not reserved for ‘the blackness of darkness for ever?’ On the contrary, Why should mansions of blessedness, ‘an eternal weight of glory,’ await us rather than others? Why, thou God of our salvation, were we made to ‘know the joyful sound’ of the gospel, and to ‘walk in the light of thy countenance?’ Why made the subjects of a ‘hope that maketh not ashamed,’ a hope full of immortal prospects? ‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!’ Behold, Christians, the oil for your lamps, by which the flame of your gratitude may be for ever fed! Feeling the sacred theme, unfeignedly

humble, and tenderly grateful, exclaim—for ‘praise is comely for the upright’—Glory, everlasting glory, ‘to Him that sitteth on the throne’ of sovereign grace, and whose government is founded in equity unimpeached! Glory to ‘the ‘Lamb that was slain,’ who has redeemed us from every curse, from sin and hell, from the power of all our enemies—who has ‘redeemed ‘us to God by his own blood,’ and has ‘given ‘us the earnest of the Spirit,’ and the ‘promise ‘of eternal inheritance!’ Alleluia! Transport, the transport of gratitude, is *reason* here.

VI. Let us now attend, finally, to the Christian’s more calm and settled enjoyments. A sovereign God has provided for him a foundation well adapted to support his faith and hope in all seasons. As an ‘heir of promise’ he has a ground of ‘strong consolation’—a consolation firm and lasting, because founded in ‘oaths, and ‘promises, and blood.’ Building on this foundation, he may obtain a ‘full assurance’ of faith, of hope, and of understanding. Of faith, from a testimony which is infallible; of hope, because ‘faithful is he that has promised;’ and of understanding, because the attributes and dispensations of God are known in their harmonious tendency.—But how can these blessings be enjoyed, except on the supposition, that there is

no sovereignty in God but what is properly and strictly benevolent, whereby is absolutely excluded the right of inflicting evil without desert? We could not depend on even the most explicit promise, if mere *will* be the standard of right and wrong. To extend the right of Sovereignty beyond the manner and degree of distributing benefits, is the same as to establish a right to do wrong, or to confound the terms sovereignty and injustice.

By the evidence derived from a clear notion of the divine character, the timid soul is relieved from all its painful fears, in the same degree that it feels a consciousness of its own freedom from hypocrisy or insincerity in its approach to God. Knowing that his ‘heart condemns him not,’ and that God is unchangeable love, the Christian’s consolation is firm, his hopes are lively, and his assurance is infallible. An assurance of interest, indeed, ‘the new name on ‘the white stone,’ may not be so legible, but this does not deprive him of the ‘full assurance ‘of faith, and of hope.’ Thus ‘rooted and ‘grounded in love,’ and possessing ‘faith of the ‘operation of God,’ the Christian may say with the ancient church, ‘O Lord, I will praise thee: ‘though thou wast angry with me, thine anger ‘is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.



‘Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and  
‘not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my  
‘strength and my song, he also is become my  
‘salvation.’\*

Then may the Christian say, My enmity is slain; for I see God as infinitely loving and equitable. My presumption is checked; for justice forbids it. My pride is subdued; for all I have, and hope to have, is of sovereign grace. My impatience is controlled; for ‘the Judge of  
‘all the earth will do right.’ ‘Justice and judge-  
‘ment are the habitation of his throne’—‘judge-  
‘ment shall return unto righteousness, and all  
‘the upright in heart shall follow it.’ What plea can rebellion urge, in the face of love and justice? What room is left for despair, but in the breast of the wilful offender? If a spiritual and rational delight be our portion, either in this or a future state, it must be derived from an apprehension of that character of the great Supreme which has been represented. This representation, feelingly contemplated, will serve as a clue to guide the soul out of every labyrinth, to extricate the passions out of painful perplexities, and to avoid snares the most dangerous. And, finally, by the salutary aid of such prin-

\* Isa. xii. 1.

ciples, not only a contemplation of the works and ways of God, and personal religion, become more interesting; but also scriptural theology and moral science will appear delightfully harmonious, while they mutually assist and confirm each other.

SECT. III.

*A view of Equity and Sovereignty in reference to Theological Controversies.*

**J**UST views of Equity and Sovereignty, and of the primary truths which flow from them, are of great importance in appreciating the merits of theological systems, and in adjusting a great number of subordinate controverted points. A full examination of such points, and systems of doctrine, does not comport with the leading design of this work, which is rather to establish general principles, and to shew, in a brief manner, their applicability to a variety of subjects. I shall here notice only a few heads of controversy, by way of specimen.\*

I. Some controversies have their origin in the different views which are taken of the *divine laws*. Every law of God, whether moral or positive, is founded in his equitable government. Whatever sentiments, therefore, tend to subvert obedience to these laws, are levelled against the authority and will of the supreme

\* If life and health be spared, and 'if the Lord will,' it is my purpose to examine, in detail, a variety of theological sentiments in a separate form.

Governor. Opposition to the continued authority of the *moral* law has been made on very different grounds and pretences; but no argument, no topic,—not even that of sovereign grace, or divine influence, or Christian liberty,—can set aside our obligation of conformity to this law; because the sovereignty of divine grace does not, nor can it from the nature of things, relax, or alter the equity of divine government.—But more particularly :

First, The *Antinomian* opposes the moral law and government of God; and holds, that grace in our hearts removes from us the authority of this law, and, of course, our obligation of conformity to its commands. What is this, in effect, but to maintain, that sovereign grace and moral government are incompatible? Those who are not decreed to be saved, the Antinomians allow, are under the government of the moral law; but those who are decreed to be saved by grace, are not. The perfections of Equity and Sovereignty, they acknowledge, are exercised towards different persons, but not towards the same persons. The elect, say they, ought not to be threatened; and the non-elect ought not to be invited to believe. Thus they make what God has not revealed, and what it is impossible for us to know, the rule of our conduct! Instead of appealing to ‘the law and the testimony,’

they appeal to the book of the divine decrees, as the sole standard of human actions. But it has been shewn, in the former part of this work, that every man, without exception, is at once free and passive; as free, he is unavoidably the subject of moral government founded in equity; as passive, an object on whom are conferred different degrees of goodness or grace flowing from sovereignty. Now, to give the least colour of consistency to their scheme, they ought to shew, that the elect are not free, not moral agents, but merely the passive recipients of divine grace. Thus, in fact, they endeavour to subvert, in various ways, essential characters and relations both in God and in man.

It is true, St. Paul asserts of Christians, that they are ‘not under the law, but under grace.’ And this is a glorious truth in several respects. They are not under the *curse* of the law; because their surety, to whom they are united, bore its curse for them. They are not under the moral law as a *covenant*, for Christ, by his perfect obedience, fulfilled its conditions, and they are interested in him as their federal Head and representative. They are not under the Mosaic law, consisting of moral and positive precepts, as a *covenant of peculiarity*, which was binding upon the Jews for a limited time. But neither these, nor any other considerations, can



free believers from the obligation of obedience and conformity to the moral law as a rule of rectitude; without absurdly supposing either that the moral Governor may be dethroned, or that his human subjects may be deprived of their humanity.

When an Antinomian hears the phrase, ‘ the law is a rule of life,’ he attends more to the sound of words, than to the truth of ideas and the intended meaning; for, either wilfully or ignorantly, he exclaims, What *legality*! Legal, indeed, would be the teacher who intended by it, that our obedience to the moral law may be of such a nature as to *entitle* us to eternal life, as a substitute for the righteousness of the Saviour. To such teachers we may suitably apply the castigatory remark of the apostle: ‘ they know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm.’ The same apostle says, ‘ the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.’ A covenant of life, it cannot be to any man, in his degenerate, or even his renewed state; but a rule of rectitude, by which our life and conduct should be governed, it must be, both on earth and in heaven. For no creature *can* be exempt from obligation of obedience to the moral governor, without destroying the essential character both of the governor and the governed.

Secondly, The *Hyper-calvinist* maintains, that the sacrifice of Christ was, in no respect, a price of redemption, except for the elect exclusively; and that there is no divine law which requires *any* one to believe that Christ died *for him*. This was not the sentiment of CALVIN, as before shewn; and therefore it may be denominated *Hyper-Calvinian*. The sanction of a great name, however, or the want of such a sanction, is of little moment; the primary consideration should be, What is consistent with the uniform tenor of divine revelation? The greatest of uninspired men have sometimes deviated from the narrow path of truth, and all are liable to deviate, through the remains of prejudice and the want of closer search under the teachings of celestial wisdom. If the sentiment under present notice be strictly analyzed, we shall probably find that a part of it, I mean the part of exclusion, has no more foundation in truth, than CALVIN's inference, from the decree of predestination to life, that there must be a decree of reprobation. But, as his inference was not fairly drawn, or drawn from a false principle, that 'certain prescience implies a decree' of the evil as well as of the good; so a price of redemption, and the actual deliverance of some as the effect of it, is not a sufficient basis for the inference, that all others who are not actually and eventually delivered, were excluded by a decree from

all personal relation to the one great sacrifice for sin, and from an obligation to believe, on the authority of a divine law, that Christ died *for them*.

The Hyper-calvinist is ever urging such considerations as these, If Christ died *for* all, how could any be lost? If God *designed* the death of Christ to be a ransom for all, why are not all saved? Can his design be frustrated? If all were redeemed with a price, then all must be redeemed by power; for how can these be separated? If the term *all* be not restricted to some of all sorts, how can the design agree with the event? And if Christ died not for all individually, what divine law can require them to believe it? These, and a variety of arguments, rather objections, of the same kind, overlook the true state of the question, or at least a clear definition of the terms and the thing intended. Wherein do such hypothetical questions differ, in effect, from the following: If the diurnal luminary was made to shine *for* all, how could any be without its light? If it was *designed* for all, how could the Creator's design be frustrated? If all have an objective means of seeing the sun, how can this be separated from actually seeing it? If the term *all* be not restricted, to some of all ages and countries, how can the supposed design of creating the sun correspond with the

fact of numbers *not* seeing it? It is replied, that the fact of the sun being designed to shine at all, implies *another* design of the Creator, viz. That there would be created percipient beings who should actually enjoy his light. But this design of certain enjoyment to some, as a primary reason of existing light, has no influence to restrict the other more general design. In like manner, Christ being designed as a sacrifice for sin at all, implies that some would be formed spiritually to enjoy the benefit; otherwise he would have been 'set forth as a propitiation' without wisdom. Nay, this may be considered as the *primary* reason, why he died at all. But this more specific design, without which he would not have been made a sin-offering, has no influence to restrict another more general design. For what conceivable tendency has the one to limit the other? Let the special design of God by the death of Christ to save some, be considered as an established fact; the question is, What aptitude is there in this fact to limit another design of a more general nature founded on the *same* sacrifice, but extended to *other* objects?

The truth is, that the Hyper-calvinist does not distinguish between the design of God, in the character of a moral governor, respecting the subjects of his government, as such; and his

design as a sovereign benefactor in relation to his creatures in their passive capacity. In the character of a moral governor, he 'has no 'respect of persons,' but deals with all alike as free and accountable, affords the same objective means, the same ground of hope, the same inducements for believing and repenting, and exhibits the same blessings, and the same meritorious medium. But in the character of a sovereign benefactor he has a more select design, which is that of an actual imputation of the meritorious sacrifice to those whom he has destined to be mystically united to that great High Priest who has offered it to satisfy law and justice. The sovereign purpose is thus unfolded by the event, which to mortals is the only index of such gracious and specific intention. So that predestinating love and mercy are not known except by *inference* from the actual mystical union; and this by its effects, appearing in the spirit and exercise of faith, a renovation of mind and habits, a reformation of conduct and pursuits. No such fruit can be conceived to proceed from any thing short of divine energy, and consequently an eternal purpose. To begin with enquiring, *a priori*, who are probably the objects of electing love, is an unprofitable, a delusive, and a dangerous process. It draws away the mind from a plain and immediate duty, and directs it to the divine *arcana* which must be



for ever and necessarily inscrutable to finite minds, except as they are disclosed by the event, or by some special revelation which no one is authorized to expect.

Now, from the design of the moral governor in making the great sacrifice a basis for *exhortations* to repent, and to believe that there is 'forgiveness with God,' it follows that the Hyper-calvinist is wrong in supposing there is no divine law to oblige a sinner to believe that Christ died *for him*. It is generally added, indeed, 'for him *in particular*;' but this is nothing to the purpose, for a particular specification has no reference to the laws of moral government, and therefore can be no rule of duty. The question is, whether divine law requires us, as sinners indefinitely and without exception, to believe that the death of Christ is a moral mean exhibited for an inducement to faith and repentance. If this be the case, then it is the duty of every one to submit to this law, to believe and obey it, and to acknowledge, that Christ in this respect died *for him*. It must be observed, however, that no one has a right to determine the safety of his *state* because he admits this general proposition, 'Christ has died *for me*;' for the requisitions of the moral governor extend to a cordial reception of the atoning sacrifice and perfect righteousness of

Jesus Christ by a faith which unites the soul to him, and submits to his authority. Obedience to one command, or part of a law, does not exempt the subject of it from obedience to the other. The one ought to be done, and the other not left undone. That Christ 'died for our sins'—'gave himself for us'—'was delivered for our offences'—'bore our sins in his own body on the tree'—'suffered the just for the unjust, to bring us to God'—'gave himself a ransom for all to be testified'—are *direct* objects of faith, and which on divine authority we are *required* to believe. But that Christ died for this or that person *in particular*, with a sovereign peculiarity of design, is no object of faith at all; except he had a special revelation for that purpose: it is rather an *inference* from the fruits of believing, which reason draws by means of consciousness. If I am conscious of possessing the scriptural marks, and genuine effects of a saving interest in Christ, I may then, but not before, *infer* that he died for me *in particular*, according to a sovereign speciality of design in my favour.

Thirdly, The *Neonomian* contends that the gospel is a *new law*; a law, mild, easy, and remedial, compared with the more rigid and inflexible moral standard. The term, indeed, which was much in use about a century ago, is

now seldom heard; but the sentiment which it was intended to express is, perhaps, more prevalent than ever. It is, by great numbers, constantly advanced from the pulpit and the press. Its advocates imagine that *sincerity* stands instead of personal perfection,—that faith and repentance are easy substitutes for universal conformity to the moral law,—and that ‘our ‘imperfect obedience’ is a mild and remedial way of acceptance with God, under the gospel dispensation in lieu of the more harsh and severe demands of the original law as a covenant,—and thus prove, how imperfect is their knowledge both of law and gospel. Their error consists, chiefly in their putting good things in wrong places, and for unauthorized uses. They seem to ‘go about to establish ‘their own righteousness’ in a new method, that is, by a new law.

It is natural to ask, Were not repentance, and faith, and sincerity, required under *every* dispensation of revealed religion? Was not every true believer, like Abraham, *always* accepted? Was not every sincere penitent, as well as David, the subject of pardon, in *all* ages? How then can the gospel be a remedial law, as contradistinguished from all preceding modes of acceptance? The truth is, that the gospel points out no method essentially dif-

ferent from what is contained in the Old Testament; but only unfolds the promises, and points out their objects in a clearer light. The same 'righteousness of God' was the object of faith; the same divine mercy through the very same medium, was the source of forgiveness; and the same exercise of faith and repentance, in *sincerity*, was demanded through every period. The moral law is as much in force now, as it was in the days of David, or Moses, or Abraham, or Methuselah. And the way of acceptance with God is precisely the same now, as in any preceding age. How then can the Neonomians adopt the sentiment, that the gospel is a remedial, a more easy law? The cause of their singular conclusion is, that they do not distinguish between the moral law as a rule, and as a covenant. In the latter sense, it was never enacted since the first transgression; and in the former, it has always been and ever will be in force. The claims of the moral governor are uniformly the same, as far as this law is concerned; but the gospel discovers clearly how a sinner may be delivered from the curse of a broken covenant. By a sovereign appointment, its federal claims are abrogated with regard to all those who receive the second Adam; because he has fulfilled it as a covenant, and is therefore 'the Lord our righteousness.' A personal interest in him answers all federal demands;

but the obligation to a moral rule remains unaltered. It still requires us to credit all that God testifies, to cast away our hostility by repentance, and to obey whatever he commands with sincerity. The hope of forgiveness, indeed, it does not propose; this is done only by a gracious promise, a stream that flows in another, a sovereign channel.

The Mosaic law, considered as a covenant of peculiarity to the Jews, as subservient to the Messiah's advent, and which was for ages a galling yoke, though a wise and necessary appointment, has been removed by the gospel; which, in this respect, is an easy yoke and a light burden. But this is not abrogating the moral law; it is only removing some positive rites, burdensome to the observer of them, which were blended with it: the use of their original institution being accomplished, their obligation ceased of course, though it was difficult to induce Pharisaic spirits to relinquish their observance, and to dissuade them from the hope of obtaining righteousness and acceptance with God in that way. The Neonomian scheme is only Pharisaism in a new form,—a mode of obtaining righteousness by an easy instead of a hard *work*. Righteousness always has been to fallen man, as it is now, of *grace*, and not of *works*; while obligation of compliance with



divine prescriptions arises from the moral law. Righteousness and life are exhibited as the gifts of sovereign bounty, and in the gospel shine with unclouded lustre; and the terms proposed on which we may expect to obtain these blessings are founded in the equity of divine government. Thus, both the Antinomian and the Neonomian hypotheses are alike subverted in the mind of the intelligent Christian, by a due consideration of the same general principles of Equity and Sovereignty, and their genuine operations in the divine plans of government and grace. Without sovereign grace, there cannot be any righteousness or salvation; and without equitable requisitions, there can be no moral government.

Fourthly, The *Antipedobaptist* excludes infants from being intended in the law of baptism; pleading, that this law is *entirely positive*, and that a subject not *expressly* specified must of course be excepted. He does not seem to reflect, that the distinction between *moral* and *positive* with respect to laws, is a mere *nominal* species, attended indeed with some advantage, but very liable to be abused. Thus the distinctions great and small, strong and weak, beautiful and deformed, old and young, learned and illiterate, and a thousand more, in the provinces of nature and of science, though

useful in many respects, are all nominal, as founded in comparative relations, and not admitting of any *absolute point* of difference. The common definition of a positive law is, ‘ A law ‘ the reason of which we do not perceive; and ‘ which is enacted by the sole authority of the ‘ lawgiver.’ But such definitions, if they deserve that appellation, point out no *essential* difference, but rest on a fluctuating base; that of our comparative *reason* and *perception*, which are merely nominal and relative, rather than real differences founded in the nature of things. According to this, or any similar definition, a little more perception of the reason of the law, would alter its essential character! The truth is, and it arises from the definition itself, that the same law may be positive in some respects, or to some degree, but not in another. And such, the Antipedobaptist must concede, if he will but properly reflect upon the nature of the subject, is the law of baptism, enacted by the Christian Legislator. Though antecedently no one had a right to assume what specific laws he would enact; yet in the law of baptism we may *perceive* a good *reason* and a peculiar fitness in the including of infants with their parents.

It is observable, that the *inference* of exclusion is deduced, not from the nature of the case, but from the arbitrary, imperfect definition,

which expresses no real and essential difference. The divine Legislator says to his ministers, ‘Go, disciple all nations, baptizing them.’ How is it possible to understand the import of this or of any other law, without attending to the state of things prior to the time of its promulgation, and the circumstances of the case? The infant offspring of professing parents had always been included in their privileges; on what principle then are they to be *excepted* in the present case, without an *express* declaration for that purpose? The Antipedobaptist replies, The law of baptism is *entirely positive*, and *therefore* what is not verbally expressed ought not to be included. What is this but arguing in a circle on a false assumption? The Pedobaptist, on the other hand, maintains, not from an arbitrary assumption, but from the nature of the case, that the law of baptism is *not* entirely positive,—that infants had been, and were at the time, included in the privileges of their parents,—that the law itself does not exclude them either explicitly or by implication,—and therefore the law of baptism *does* embrace them.

Religious privileges, though external and relative, are sovereign grants; and it behoves parents and ministers to reflect, on what authority they *revoke* them, and who requires this at their hands. They should have more weighty reasons

than those which are founded on arbitrary definitions of terms, or a doubtful inference from supposed silence. What evidence is there in the apostles' practice, that they *excluded* infants from the relative privileges of their parents? By sovereign favour they were once included; where is the *divine* law that now debars them? In vain we look into the law of baptism, or to apostolic practice, for any exclusive clause, or any unfavourable token.

God's covenant of grace, respecting fallen man, is the fruit of divine sovereignty; but its external administration stands related to his equitable government. The law of baptism is an instrument of moral administration, a sign of spiritual blessings, and a confirming token, or sealing certainty, of the Christian covenant in its outward form. To suppose, as the Antipedobaptist does, that a participation of the thing signified is the *rule* for administering the sign, is to make a thing unknown, and to us unknowable, the standard of our judgment. That the divine Lawgiver should *require* of adults a profession of their faith, repentance, and obedience, is perfectly equitable; because they are capable of the contrary, and were previously found in an adverse state of disobedience, impenitence, and unbelief. But to make a profession *universally* necessary, to the exclusion



of infants who are incapable of the *contrary* profession, is to limit 'the Holy One of Israel,'—to exclude the lambs of his flock from the fold of his visible church, because they cannot express their relation to him,—or, to make the procedure of sovereign grace in the mode of dispensing its benefits to mankind, the rule of our conduct. Wherein does this, virtually, differ from that exploded doctrine which makes the divine decrees the rule of human actions? In a word, it confounds the essentially different provinces of Sovereignty in the communication of grace, and Equity in the administration of laws.

Fifthly, There are many professors of Christianity in the present day, who, in point of denomination, have been hitherto *non-descripts*; but who, for the sake of distinction, and to prevent circumlocutions, may be named, (I hope without offence, for none is really intended,) *Contractionists*; because they contract and limit the apostolic precepts and examples, by reducing them unjustifiably to *positive laws*. Their general view of positive laws coincides with that of the Antipedobaptists; but they differ as to their *number*; making weekly communion, the kiss of charity, mutual public exhortations, a free ministry, and almost every particular practised and observed in the churches



founded by the apostles, to be of *positive* institution. When they can ascertain what customs and rites were in use under the direction of the first ministers of Christ, they take it for granted that the same *ought* to be literally followed by all other Christian churches. The propriety of such an inference they do not seem to suspect. They do not enquire so much into the moral design and evangelical end of those rites and customs, and how the *spirit* of them may be observed with most advantage in different ages and situations, as into the bare *facts* themselves; and conclude, that Christian faithfulness consists in a close imitation of the letter and external mode. Some of them, indeed, admit of Christian forbearance towards others who cannot see precisely with them in all points; but others are less accommodating, and make any one point of difference in the observance of these supposed positive laws, a sufficient ground of exclusion from their church. Their chief controversy with other Christians and among themselves, is about external order, the mode of worship and discipline; in brief, about what others call the circumstantialia of religion; the natural effects of which are perpetual divisions and disputes. While they adhere to a false and fickle rule of interpretation, it is natural to expect that their inquiries will terminate in different results. Were they all

of one mind at any given period, there is no probability that they could long agree together in the same society. They seem to subvert the order of the gospel by the very mode of attempting to establish that order, — which is, by rendering the end subservient to the means, instead of making the means subservient to the end. Assuming, as they do, that faithfulness to the divine Lawgiver consists in a firm adherence to a literal imitation of New Testament customs, whatever becomes of the spiritual design of them, and that ‘every pin of the tabernacle is ‘precious,’ in their sense, it would be wonderful indeed, if, as to their order and discipline, they continued long ‘at one stay.’

It is not denied, that persons of real piety may be found gliding into these notions, by the inadvertent adoption of an unauthorised rule of interpreting the scriptures. But they would do well to consider, what is the nature of a Christian church. Is it not a voluntary society of Christians, founded on the grand *design* of the apostolic churches? Whatever body of Christians, therefore, voluntarily associated, best comports with this design, is the most apostolic church. The apostles, and the spirit of Christ in them, took men, customs, and circumstances, as they found them, as is manifest from their epistles, directing their efforts to the advancement of spiritual

Christianity. Whatever was calculated, though in different modes, most effectually to promote the glory of God, the triumphs of the Saviour's grace, the extension of his cause, and the power of religion in the souls of men, they recommended and urged, and approved of in others. This, indeed, is implied in their having a fixed, ultimate end in view, to which every thing was made subservient. If this design was not likely to be answered, however literal the imitation, and however conscientious the parties, there was a defect; and any variation from what they had sanctioned in other circumstances, provided that variation tended more effectually to secure the proposed higher end, must consistently have been approved by them. They did not, under divine inspiration however infallible, prescribe positive laws, or usages in the churches, as if the observance of them were a test of faithfulness in addition to their moral aptitude; but as helps to promote the highest effects of Christianity, according to the circumstances of time, place, and previous customs. 'I became all things to all men, if by any means I might gain some.' To do 'all things decently and in order,' has a direct tendency to glorify God and to advance his cause; but to suppose that no two societies can do this without a punctilious conformity to the church of Jerusalem, Corinth, Rome, or Ephesus, or to one another, is

contrary to fact, and absurd in theory. Those Mosaic rites which required an exact observance, were appointed for a peculiar end; but rites and customs in a church of Christ are of the nature of moral means to promote one general design.

It may be asked, Will not this leave men too much at liberty to form *unscriptural* rules? I reply, nothing can be unscriptural which in the most direct and effectual manner promotes the end for which Christian churches were instituted. The first enquiry of a congregated religious body should be, How may this end be best attained, under the corrective rules of the New Testament? Against those who succeed, 'there is no law.' They who contend stiffly for the literal imitation, and are contentious about the manner for its own sake, discover too much of the Pharisaic spirit, and overlook the end of all regulations. It may be useful to consider whether it be not the spirit of initial Popery, though without coercion, operating on a smaller scale; in which positive laws are multiplied, supposed to be founded on apostolic practice, while the spirit of religion, and the grand design of Christianity, are cast into the shade.

These *Contractionists*, while they profess universal subjection to the legislative authority of Jesus Christ, form laws of their own in his

name; that is, make those to be *positive* which he has not made so,—endeavour to confine the spirit and intent of his laws to one literal channel,—limit the generous, vigorous, and expansive operations of sovereign grace to a narrow nook of their own formation,—and manifest a lamentable want of candour and equity towards those who do not follow their steps. ‘Where ‘the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty,’ and those who are under his influence, and who understand the sublime end of the gospel, will not be confined to the contracted bounds thus prescribed to them, in which they must glorify God, by men who mistake the nature of positive laws, and assume an unsanctioned rule of explaining scripture. The authority of Christ in his church is indeed paramount, in this there is no supposed difference; but the question is, By what mode of interpretation are we to ascertain that authority? Not by rivetting our attention to words and syllables, nor by critically comparing terms and phrases merely, though this is not to be neglected; but chiefly by observing the various and unfettered manner in which inspired men adopted means to prosecute the holy end of their engagements. They rose superior to external niceties, nor would they form any shackles whereby our progress might be retarded in pursuing the same end,—the glory of God our Saviour and the salvation of men. It



might be profitable occasionally to reflect, how a primitive minister or christian ‘full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,’ would act in this or that situation among us? Doubtless he would pity and reprove the *Contractionist*, and direct him to seek more of ‘the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind,’—to be ‘zealously affected in a good cause,’ in every noble design whereby a tribute of praise might be paid to his divine Master,—and ‘to endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory,’—to engage heartily in every scheme of usefulness within his reach, suggested by the word and providence of God,—to contemplate with judgment, and pursue with ardour, the exalted end for the sake of which all occasional directions were given, and to which all peculiar exemplifications were subservient.

II. A great number of controversies originate in the different views which are taken of *human depravity*. As is the settled opinion of any one on this point, so will be his whole scheme of divinity. Those who take opposite sides, so radical is the subject, must unavoidably, in order to be consistent, have their system of other doctrines in opposition. They cannot possibly have the same views of the divine purposes, of scriptural predestination and election,

of the covenant of grace, of the righteousness and person of Christ, and consequently of divine personalities; they must have different sentiments on the operations of the Spirit of God, on the nature of Christian graces, faith, repentance, and love, on regeneration, conversion, and justification, and on nearly the whole compass of the Arminian controversy. Of the truth of this remark, PELAGIUS and CELESTIUS of old, and Dr. WHITBY and Dr. TAYLOR of late, were fully aware. It is therefore of the utmost importance to a Christian divine to have accurate views of this doctrine.

First, Some regard human nature as *not at all* depraved. Though they allow that individual persons corrupt themselves by transgression, yet this does not infect their nature, or alter the power of their free will; so that they are always able to practise virtue, please God, resist temptation, and keep the divine laws. The first person of any note who agitated a controversy in the Christian church on this point was PELAGIUS, in connexion with his active coadjutor CELESTIUS, about the beginning of the fifth century. But it should be remembered that the sentiment itself was not novel at that time in the world; it was common enough in every age, as well in the schools of philosophy as among the thoughtless,

gay, and profane heathens. But it was certainly considered to be a new doctrine in the Christian church at this time. Probably some crude and unguarded statements of original sin afforded the immediate occasion. ORIGEN had expressed some strong intimations to the same effect, and had, most likely, found them scattered among the writings of the Platonists, the Aristotelians, and the Stoics. To which we may add, that some of the unbelieving Jews appear to have held similar sentiments. No distinct sect at present avows the name of PELAGIUS, but the principles maintained and propagated by him are often found among different denominations of professing Christians, in all parts of the world, and particularly in our own country,—both in the national church and out of it. It is the common doctrine of declared infidels, of the general body of modern Unitarians, and of some others in different denominations.

He is a *Pelagian*, in whatever communion of professing Christians he may be found, who holds, that human nature is not depraved—that the death of mankind is not the consequence of sin—that free will, and not any grace, is the source of all virtue—that the sin of the first man affected only himself—that mankind have always had full power to keep the law of God,

and need no divine influence to aid them for holy living—that scriptural predestination to life, or election, is founded on foreseen obedience—that efficacious grace, and the previous influence of the Holy Spirit, are inconsistent with free will—that man obtains justification, or pardon and acceptance with God, not of grace, not through the merit of Christ, but by that of good works performed in our own strength.—PELAGIUS further held, ‘that for us to be men, is of God; but that for us to be righteous, is of ourselves’—that salvation might be obtained three ways, by the law of nature, by the law of Moses, and by the law of Christ—that actual sinless perfection is attainable in this life—that the good works of heathens, without any gracious assistance, but performed in their own strength, were truly good and acceptable to God—and, finally, that since the conversion of infidels and their perseverance in goodness are works of their own natural power, there is no need of praying for them.

These dogmas, it is true, are sufficiently congenial with human pride; they flatter our vanity, and raise us to greatness in our own esteem. But it is truly marvellous, how Christian divines, so called, could have ventured upon the adoption of notions so glaringly opposite to both the spirit and the letter of the

Christian scriptures. If a new born infant be as free from a depraved nature as Adam before he transgressed, he does not receive the kingdom of heaven as the gift of Christ—he needs no regeneration of any kind—he requires not to be brought to Christ for his efficacious blessing. Beside, if human nature is not depraved, in some sense, how is it that mankind so universally deprave themselves? If all the trees be naturally good, how comes it to pass that not one tree is found without bad fruit? How is it that children, as universal experience proves, are so prone to follow bad examples, and so backward to imitate good ones? Surely there must be some defect, some want of a virtuous principle, in order to account for these incontrovertible facts. However critics may dispute about the meaning of scripture, and especially the apostolic writings, plain facts cannot be disputed. There is no effect without a cause. Let a Pelagian, on his principles, if he can, account for any one sin. He knows not the true origin of any; how then should he account for millions of transgressions? Were he humble and modest enough, he might know the real cause of all sin, the origin of all evil; but his pride of understanding will not allow him. He will sooner plunge into endless absurdities, and the most palpable contradictions.



Secondly, Some regard human nature as *partially* depraved. Among professing Christians who pay some deference to the declarations of holy writ, this is the more common sentiment. They justly reflect, that to embrace the Pelagian sentiment in its full extent, would be to rush blindfold against the dictates of reason and common sense, as well as the plainest affirmations of the sacred oracles. Yet some of the Pelagian leaven they are desirous of retaining, lest man and free will be brought too low, lest its rejection should affect his accountability, and lest human transgressions be made ultimately to reflect dishonour upon our Maker. Ability and obligation, say they, are commensurate; and were there not some ability remaining, as opposed to total depravity, how could men be accountable? By such reasonings they abundantly shew, that they understand not the real nature of moral depravity, nor the grounds of moral obligation. They see no difference between being *able* and being *willing* to do a thing. Their notion of the self-determining power of the will is a thick and impenetrable veil, which, so long as they retain it, will always keep them in the dark. If they cannot see, they may be told, ‘if haply they may feel ‘after’ the truth, that it is not the will, but the nature of man, as virtuous or vicious, that determines his choice; and from which all his depraved

actions proceed. A self-determining power in man or angel, or in the Maker of all, has for its countenance neither scripture, sense, nor science. There can be no excellence in what is not possible. Were it a perfection in God, there would be some shew of argument in claiming it as an excellence in man. But before any attempt the latter, let them, if they can, establish the former. In that attempt, peradventure, they may find where the truth stands.

Thirdly, Some regard human nature as *totally* depraved. This requires cautious explanation, the want of which has occasioned the Pelagian and the Semipelagian to prefer the doctrine of the proud stoic,—of the sceptic, the infidel, and the giddy multitude,—to evangelical truth. As this view of the subject has so frequently been misapprehended and abused, it may be proper to state what it *does not* contain or imply. It does NOT imply, that any thing in man essential to moral obligation is impaired—that the physical powers of the mind are essentially changed—that it is a substance, or something positive, conveyed from father to son—that it is, in some sense, an effect of divine operation or purpose—that its removal requires the superinduction of some new physical faculty.—No such ideas are intended or implied in the doctrine of total moral depravity.

If these particulars, which have been so often made to form a caricature of the doctrine, are excluded, let us inquire what is the sentiment maintained. It is, (1) That no one of the human race, as a natural descendant of the first man, is possessed of perfect righteousness and true holiness, such as Adam had before his transgression. Considered as his posterity, we are destitute of it; and yet all we have from the Creator, in the course of his providence, is good of its kind, and therefore worthy of him. (2) That the absence of this perfect righteousness and holiness is *total*, because there is no medium between perfection and the want of it. The breach of one link is a breach of the whole chain. A defect of one inch in measure, or of one ounce in weight, is a total defect in reference to the standard. The want of full measure or weight is a forfeiture of the whole. (3) That in this state of defect, which is a forfeiture in Equity, sovereign efficacious influence is not included in the statement; for God's work in forming Adam's descendants may, without this, be perfect as far as it goes; and therefore, that there is not *any* principle of real and absolute virtue in mankind since the first forfeiture, except what is superinduced by sovereign pleasure. Whatever qualities, without a new birth by the sovereign will of God, go under the name of goodness and virtue, in a loose and

indeterminate sense, are but comparatively and negatively so. One may be better, or not so bad, compared with another; and yet be destitute of that supreme regard to God, which is the essence of true virtue. (4) That in this condition of defect, and absence of real virtue, though one human being may be, through disobedience, farther gone from original righteousness, than another, yet the deviation of all is *alike total* from the standard of rectitude and the principle of virtuous obedience. (5) That the will of man, in this destitute state, though allowed all conceivable freedom, has not the least tendency to remove that defect which is here designated by a nature totally depraved. The reason is, because every will is determined by the nature of the agent, and it is not the province of any nature to change itself. Whatever exhortations and requisitions in scripture carry that appearance, it is always implied that gracious assistance is to be sought and obtained for that purpose. Persuasions, representations of truth, exhortations, and every species of moral means, however excellent in their tendency, only afford occasions for the will's determination and choice; for we cannot say, consistently with truth and fact,—as is the worthiness of the object to be chosen by mankind in the present state, so will be the goodness of their choice; but we can safely assert, as is

the nature of any agent, so will be the quality of his choice.

Such is the nature of that total depravity of mankind which is here maintained,—the *total want* of what ought to be in a moral agent, in order to constitute his ground of acquittal and acceptance, to ensure his happiness by a radical moral conformity to God, and consequently to remove his obnoxiousness to suffer. This obnoxiousness to suffer, is sometimes termed ‘the *guilt* of Adam’s transgression,’ because his transgression deprived himself, and by natural consequence his posterity, of that perfection of righteousness and purity which he once enjoyed, wherein consisted his real happiness. And thus all the descendants of Adam, ‘in whom all have sinned,’ are *guilty*, in the sense of obnoxiousness to suffer, by equitable and necessary imputation;—as the guilt of a father, by an act of treason, is imputed to his son, inasmuch as the father’s act renders him obnoxious to forfeitures and sufferings. Mankind, as descendants of Adam, are endowed with physical powers and capacities for performing moral obedience, and these are worthy of creating and providential power; but the possession of *these* cannot render any one happy, without moral conformity to God. Hence a plan of deliverance from this destitute condition, as it



cannot proceed from divine Equity towards the human objects, must necessarily originate in sovereign mercy. This plan is fully revealed in the gospel,—by a substitute, an atonement to justice, a perfect righteousness, and a fulness of grace. Without this merciful provision, the state of mankind would be hopeless; as possessing natural capacities for exalted happiness, but destitute of moral qualifications.

A gracious renovation by a spiritual birth, which is a fruit of 'the tree of life,' an effect of mediatorial merit and power, removes that incapacity which is implied in a morally depraved state,—a state of deprivations and wants, of being obnoxious to suffer the necessary consequence of disconformity to a holy and just God,—and puts the subject in possession of a counteracting principle. The soul, by this renovation, emerges from the total depravity before described, to a state of holiness 'without which no man shall see the Lord,' that is, be capacitated for happiness in the enjoyment of him. Hereby it is attached and united to the chief good, and becomes habitually disposed to secure it, in a full and lasting enjoyment, by laborious conflicts, according to the directions of revealed truth. But here we should carefully avoid the confounding of two things which are essentially different,—The removal of *total*

*depravity* by a spiritual birth, and the *total removal* of all depravity. The former, which is the fruit of a vital union to Christ, and simultaneous with acceptance, takes place at once, and therefore, as an event, is represented with singular propriety under the notion of a birth; but the latter is affected progressively. The one is accomplished, when a soul is ‘accepted in the beloved’—‘complete in Christ’—‘born of the spirit;’—the other, by degrees, ‘through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth,’—by being ‘changed from glory to glory as by the spirit of the Lord,’—by being enabled ‘through the spirit to mortify the deeds of the body,’—by vigorously opposing all temptations to sin, and, by seeking, in the use of all instituted and other laudable means, ‘glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life.’

As the preceding representations of the fact, and of the removal of human depravity, recommend themselves, it is presumed, to impartial reason; so they are evidently included in the scriptural doctrines of Equity and Sovereignty. And it is of importance to remark, that the *introduction* of this total depravity may be accounted for in the same way. For it is allowed, on all hands, in the first instance, that Adam was created in God’s moral image, that is, ‘in righteousness and true holiness,’ which

he possessed for a time ;—and it is demonstrable, that this continuance for a time was of sovereign favour, and not his claim in equity ; otherwise this claim must have prevented his actual failure—that what was thus granted as a sovereign favour, might be discontinued without any injustice to Adam, provided those physical powers were continued which constitute a sufficient ground of moral obligation—that what he lost at the first step of his apostacy from rectitude, was efficacious influence to prevent him from yielding to temptation—that this efficacious influence was *not* afforded or given to him *when* he was *not hindered* from sinning ; for efficacious prevention and permission are contradictory ideas—that God *could* have prevented his yielding to temptation, if that had been his sovereign pleasure—that man had in himself, as every creature necessarily and unavoidably must have, a root of mutability, which is also a root of all passive dependence, consisting in limitation as a negative principle—that his will was perfectly free from constraint to an evil choice, and from restraint respecting good—that God infused or communicated no darkness into his understanding, no depravity or defect of any kind into his disposition—that his will, however, was an active principle whose appropriate object is good, but *liable* to make a choice morally wrong, if not efficaciously prevented by sovereign interpo-

sition; otherwise he would have been without a cause of change, or absolutely immutable, which is absurd—that the moment he sinned, his moral integrity and purity were lost, which loss, compared with the standard, must be deemed total—that it is absurd to suppose an obligation in equity to bestow on Adam's posterity what he had lost, since it is not essential to human nature, nor a necessary basis of moral obligation; for this would infer an obligation to pardon every sin as soon as committed, and to receive every offender into immediate favour, which annihilates the idea of law and sanction, and of all accountability; and would, in fact, exclude the possibility of a moral system—that, consequently, mankind, though born with mental and corporeal powers worthy of creating goodness, are totally depraved, in a moral sense; that is, totally defective with regard to that rectitude in which their progenitor was created, and that positive holy principle which is the fountain of all true virtue.

The preceding particulars are individually capable of abundant proof, and admit of being illustrated in various ways. But this would not comport with our intended brevity. One thing, however, which is the turning hinge of all supposed difficulty in the case, must be



noticed, viz. That the *suspension* of efficacious grace was in no respect the *cause* of Adam's first sin, though the continuance of that grace was the cause of his preceding acts of obedience, and might have been, had its exertion been sovereignly protracted, the cause of preventing his transgression. What prevents many from perceiving this difference and its importance in the controversy, is the habit of confounding positive and negative causes—making the former the only ground of certainty in events—and of not attending to the necessary distinction between a *cause* and an *occasion* of an event. Were any one to assert that the divine law is the cause of transgression, it would instantly shock a reflecting mind; but one may say with truth, that the law is an occasion of it. For, 'where there is no law there is no transgression,' and yet 'the law is holy, just and good.' Were there nothing good, there could be nothing evil; for what is evil, but a deviation from good? So that good, in some respect or other, must be the *occasion* of all evil. Were not God good and holy, it is absolutely impossible that there could be either sin or misery. Now, a display of Equity towards a perfect creature might be the occasion of his failure, but not the cause; and the suspension of efficacious grace is, in effect, the same thing. That the discontinuance of a sovereign favour, was not the *cause* of



Adam's failure, is evident; because it has not the nature of a cause of any thing. If we regard God as an agent, in him it has not the nature of a defective cause; and if we regard man, or any other creature, as the object, it is a mere non-entity; consequently, it is no cause at all. Thus creating power is a cause, but a non-exertion of creating power, has not the nature of a cause of any kind. For every cause must be either effective or defective; the former is excluded by the supposition, the latter, by God's infinite perfection.

Though divine Equity was an occasion of a perfect creature's failure, it was no influential cause, nor indeed any cause at all, of the event; any more than a law itself is a cause of its being transgressed. A perfect rule is not the cause, though the occasion, of deviation from it; and it is equally clear, that a suspension, or a non-communication, of a positive cause of good, is not the cause of evil; otherwise the want of efficacious grace would be a sufficient apology for every transgressor, which is absurd in itself, and contrary to every theory of morals. The truth is, and it is founded on evidence perfectly demonstrative, that every sin has ultimately the same origin, and the same occasion; the former is in the offender, the latter in law and equity. And indeed we may add, and

it is founded on equal evidence, the ultimate cause of all virtue, holiness, and happiness, is the same,—sovereign efficacious grace. An attempt to simplify these things by reducing them to one head—the will of God—is founded in mistake, destructive of the harmony of essential truths, and fraught with horrid consequences.

From the whole of this discussion we may infer, that the doctrine of the total depravity of human nature, as derived from Adam, is not only *asserted* in scripture, but is also founded in demonstrative principles of reason—that he who denies this doctrine, and continues consistent with himself, cannot assign any adequate reason why he is a sinner, or how any moral evil could possibly take place in the universe—that Pelagians and Semipelagians, with the latter of whom the Arminians frequently concur, under pretence of a rational inquiry, plunge themselves into the most unreasonable conclusions—and, finally, that the same principles which rationally account for any one sin in the present state of things, are adequate to account for Adam's first sin, and the total depravity of his descendants, in the sense before explained.

III. Were this the proper place, we might notice a variety of theological controversies

which originate in the different views men take of the *Supreme Being*, his nature, perfections, and character—his *purposes* or decrees—the *Person* of Jesus Christ—the nature of his *mediation*—and of his *kingdom*—divine *revelation*—and the seat of *authority* in religious matters. These topics, and many others, with their different ramifications, might be discussed on the same principles. But such discussion, however compressed, retaining at the same time the proposed advantage, could not be comprised within the limits of this volume. Many of them are already virtually included in the different parts of this work; and the examination of WHITBY'S Discourse on the Five Points, and FLETCHER'S Checks, is reserved for a separate publication.

## SECT. IV.

*A View of Equity and Sovereignty in reference to  
Moral Science.*

THAT there is one first cause, possessed of infinite moral perfections,—that there is a moral system in which creatures are accountable to the Creator for their actions—that there is an essential difference between virtue and vice—that man is the subject of liberty of choice—and of moral obligation—that he is influenced by motives—that the occurrence of moral evil has a cause—and that the fact of moral evil existing in the universe, is not incompatible with the perfections of Deity—are some of the primary considerations in moral science. A full discussion of these topics, together with their collateral and subordinate parts, would require more ample space than the concluding part of this Essay; and indeed a separate work on moral science has been long in contemplation, and is in some forwardness for the press. All that can be attempted here, are a few sketches on the points now mentioned.

I. The existence of an eternal *First Cause*, possessed of infinite perfections and moral attributes, must be now taken for granted; as

the denial of it may be proved to be an infinite absurdity, on the strictest mode of this kind of demonstration. Marks of design without a designer,—palpable effects without a cause,—a possibility of a first cause without actuality,—contingent beings without one absolute Being,—are all demonstrable contradictions.

The notion of *two eternal* principles was openly maintained by the ancient Persian Magi, and from them by the Manicheans in the early ages of Christianity. It has been also too much favoured by some philosophic sciolists of modern times. The folly of the sentiment, indeed, is exposed by shewing the incompatibility of two principles being eternal, as that would imply two infinites. But this exposure leaves the cause of evil, to account for which was the only pretence for adopting so absurd a theory, unexplained, and indeed untouched. Though, by being thus pressed, objectors are, in point of argument, completely silenced, they are not thereby enlightened; they are sufficiently confounded, but are not therefore established in that primary truth, in the light of which they see the ground of their mistake.

The single consideration of what is *due* to a creature, or what is the operation of absolute justice towards it, must at once unveil its com-



parative imperfection ; and this justice, uninfluenced by sovereign interposition, will clearly shew, that indefectible stability in goodness is *peculiar* to the first cause ; and that evil of whatever kind is *peculiar* to a creature. As evil has no conceivable existence without a subject ; so, were there no *antecedent* standard of perfection, there could be no evil. That infinite perfection should be liable to evil of any kind, involves a contradiction : for it supposes that the only standard and measure by which evil is estimated, is liable to become itself evil ; while at the same time, without that standard, for any thing to become evil, would be absolutely impossible. Hence it irrefragably follows, that only a being derived, created, or dependent, a being comparatively imperfect and defective, as contrasted with the one infinitely perfect, on whom it depends, can *possibly* be evil. And as there is no medium between Creator and creature, the just inference is, that actual evil cannot precede created existence, or that an eternal evil principle is an absolute impossibility.

Limitation, compared with essential perfection, otherwise denominated ‘ metaphysical evil,’ enters necessarily into the *difference* between the Creator and creatures ; and therefore is equally inseparable from all creatures alike, the highest and the lowest, the most pure as well as the

most polluted. This limitation or defect is not a *privation*, but an absolutely necessary *negation* of ultimate perfection. I said, an ‘absolutely necessary’ negation ; for what ideas can be more contradictory than an independent or infinitely perfect creature? In the vast universe, positively and physically considered, there is, properly speaking, no evil, or not any thing that deserves that name; for matter and motion, and the established order by which they operate, are strictly good, and worthy of infinite perfection to effect, though necessarily subject to limitation, and though sometimes they prove relatively injurious. And as to *moral* evil, which alone is *properly* denominated *evil*, it is evident that it can have no place but in a defectible moral agent. Hence it is plain, that no evil whatever, — metaphysical, physical, or moral, — could possibly exist from eternity. And to this conclusion we are led, by evidence irresistible, from a just view of divine Equity, as explained in this volume.

II. The existence of a *Moral System*, in which creatures are accountable to the Creator for their actions, must be also here assumed; but I have a particular reason for taking notice of it in this place. It cannot be expected that moral science, as contradistinguished from the philosophy of conjectures and surmises, should

make much progress in the world, but in proportion as just notions of a moral system are previously ascertained. But how is it conceivable for this to be settled, except through the medium of the moral Governor's true character? To little purpose do we reason upon 'the intellectual and active powers of man,' if we bring not into the account those perfections of Deity which are exercised towards the system, or stand related to it. After enumerating all conceivable divine perfections and attributes, of each it may be predicted, that it is either sovereign or equitable, or both, in different respects. Just views, therefore, of Equity and Sovereignty appear essentially necessary, in order to form right notions of a moral system. To sovereign benevolence belong its very existence, its welfare, and final perfection; to equitable government belong its probation, accountability, laws, and sanctions. Its conformity to rectitude, in every instance, and consequent happiness, are *caused* by sovereign energy, since no other can be really conceived; and its being left to freedom of will, to its own principle of mutability, and the uncontrolled consequence, is *occasioned* by Equity.

III. That there is an essential difference between *Virtue* and *Vice*, few are so far corrupted as formally to institute a doubt. However, a

just conception of the divine character, as equitable and sovereign, will enable us to ascertain, with greater precision, the real nature of vice and virtue. We observe, then, that God, as a Sovereign, *wills*, in a causal manner, all the perfection that exists in the created universe, and, by way of acquiescence, his own perfection; and when a free agent really designs and wills the same in his accountable acts, he exercises *essential* virtue; and whatever act comes short of this, is called virtuous only in a partial and comparative sense, a sense which is incompatible with a character predominantly vicious. When the agent seeks the chief good, as his only appropriate end, by laudable means, he has not only what is essential to true virtue, but also what is *perfective* of a virtuous character. Now, as the virtue of actions is a part of the perfection of the universe, it must be included in the sovereign appointment of its Maker and Ruler.

Vice, it must be observed, is a *deviation* from the line of that actual rectitude or perfection which God wills. The agent proposes to himself a different end of his actions, and therefore seeks happiness in opposition to the will of the Supreme; and when the end is wrong, the means cannot be laudable. And though many such acts are called virtuous, because they have a partial good tendency, yet

in reality they are vicious, owing to the agent having a different aim and will from what belong to essential virtue. Hence, because the Deity's own acts, all tending to essential perfection, and therefore in the highest sense virtuous, are agreeable to him; every deviation from that line of rectitude, being for that reason vicious, must be displeasing and hateful to him. Divine Equity, rightly understood, will still more clearly shew this to be the fact. If praise, approbation, and delight be not *due* to infinite wisdom, to absolute rectitude, and to perfection of design, that is, to perfect virtue, nothing can deserve them; and if disapprobation, blame, and abhorrence be *due* to any object in the universe, the opposite of perfect virtue, that is, vice, must deserve them. Equity requires, therefore, that virtue be approved, and vice disapproved, for the same reason that divine rectitude is approvable.

IV. Few subjects have been more acutely debated by moral philosophers, than the doctrines of *Liberty* and *Necessity*. But most of the differences and perpetual clashings, between those who have written on the opposite extremes, seem to have arisen from a common gratuitous assumption, that the truth must lie exclusively on the one side or the other. Both sides appear to concur in this one point, though they differ in



every other, that man must either be free to the exclusion of necessity, or necessitated in his actions to the exclusion of liberty. Various definitions of these terms have not been wanting; and much ingenuity has been employed towards adjusting the difference. What has been said in a preceding part of this Essay, precludes the necessity of defining and explaining these terms; but it may be remarked, that the whole controversy turns on a previous question, viz. Whether there be, or be not, in the nature of things, a negative principle of certainty. Until the disputants have settled this preludious point, their warfare will be interminable.

Keeping in mind the principles before stated and explained, — That there is no absolute necessity but that of the divine existence— that all necessity beside must be hypothetical, according to the condition on which it rests— that there is no good in the created universe but what is an effect of divine will, and, consequently, purpose;—retaining also in recollection, That liberty is a negative consideration, denoting *exemption* on the part of God as an equitable Governor, that is, *freedom*, in a negative sense, from constraint to an evil choice, and restraint from a good choice—that in every creature there is unavoidably a deficient principle of mutability—that this principle is ours in

eternal equity, because we are neither self-sufficient nor independent;—bearing also in thought, That this negative principle of defectibility is an adequate ground of knowledge to Omniscience—that the omniscient God has an infallible prescience of all events in their true causes, whether efficient or deficient—I say, when these things, which individually are capable of demonstrative proof, are taken into the account, it follows, that every man is at once, but in different respects, both necessitated and free.

If we regard a person's *evil choice*, he is free, in the fullest conceivable sense; that is, to the exclusion of all necessitating influence from the divine will. And yet his principle of mutability, which is not from divine will, is as certainly known, in all its relations and bearings, as any positive principle from the first cause; otherwise, an essential property of a creature would be unknown to the Creator; and the most fundamental relations in the nature of things would lie concealed from the view of the Omniscient. Whatever is *positive*, in actions morally evil, is from God, worthy of him, and physically good; as are all created faculties, and all their energies; but, what they have of defect, of obliquity, or failure in design, is from themselves, entirely and exclusively.

If, on the contrary, we contemplate a person's *good choice*, his will is equally free as in the other case. His liberty is not in the least degree, or in any respect, infringed. The difference consists in the principle, according to which the free volition is formed. The principle, indeed, may be, rather must be, sovereignly bestowed, in order to constitute any choice essentially virtuous; as all good in the creature is the effect of divine will. Consequently, all goodness of nature, and every virtuous principle, is the effect of gracious necessitation. But this is not exerted on the agent's will, whereby his freedom would be disturbed, but upon his nature, where the operation of sovereignty terminates, and generates a virtuous principle. Now, his mind being illuminated, discovers the fallacy and insufficiency of wrong ends and means, perceives the only worthy ultimate end, chooses it freely and deliberately, and seeks laudable means of attaining it. Here the will, perfectly free, acts according to the nature and principle of the agent; but, to suppose the will to be uninfluenced by these, is to suppose it is influenced by nothing:—that man has not rational faculties;—that every event comes to pass by chance;—or, in a word, that effects take place without a cause.

While the will is left uncontrolled in its acts of choosing, according to the greatest apparent good, the disposition itself, by which the choice is directed, is unavoidably in either of these two states, viz. possessed of a virtuous principle from sovereign benevolence, or void of it, as consistent with eternal equity. When the choice is morally good, it arises freely from the first; when the choice is morally evil, it springs with equal freedom from the second. If liberty, therefore, be the result of Equity,—if the morally good choice be the consequence of a virtuous principle,—if this be the effect of divine will, and consequently of benevolent necessitation;—if, on the other side, the morally evil choice be the consequence of a source of mutability exclusively our own, neither created, infused, nor in any form the effect of divine will—the perplexity is unravelled, and the seeming inconsistency dispelled.

The divine nature is the standard and source of all truth; it might therefore be reasonably expected that the true key for opening so intricate a lock must be a just view of the divine character in reference to free agents. Equity, in the sense defined, will teach us that man is free, and must be so, from principles the most

firm and irrefragable ; principles founded in the respective natures and essential properties of God and Man. If man be not *free*, absolutely free, from all decretive necessitation in the obliquity of his moral acts, moral government is but an illusion, and retribution but a deceptive name. But divine Sovereignty, in the sense explained, shews that man, in another view, is the subject of *necessity* ; a necessity founded on the nature, properties, and prerogative of God, and the inevitable condition of man, considered not only as a sinner but also as a creature. On these principles, and on these only, can we behold the full evidence of those important axioms, however universally acknowledged,—ALL EVIL IS FROM OURSELVES, and ALL GOOD IS FROM GOD.

V. Another important branch of moral science is the doctrine of *Moral Obligation*. We cease to wonder that philosophers differ so widely from one another, and that so many of them deviate from the truth, when we reflect, that the real character of the divine Governor occupies but a secondary part in the discussion, as appears from their systems. And in no part of moral philosophy is this remark more appropriate, than in their discourses on moral obligation. The following remarks are submitted to the consideration of the serious



enquirer after moral truth. OBLIGATION, in general, is a *binding force*. But MORAL obligation differs essentially from that which is merely *physical*. The latter excludes freedom of will, but not the former. A man may be *obliged* to go to prison, or to be executed, though *against* his will. Moral obligation implies force only in a *hypothetical* manner: that is, IF the agent would attain his ultimate happiness, he *must* choose the appropriate end and means,—pure virtue. But whence comes the proposal, either explicit or implied, of ultimate happiness to the free agent? It originates in Sovereignty, the sovereign benevolence of the Creator, who has made us what we are, capable of such happiness, and ever seeking it instinctively. And why are we *obliged* to seek it in the way of pure virtue, or by conformity to perfect rectitude? Because virtue and ultimate happiness are inseparably connected in the nature of things, that is, in eternal truth. The unchangeable nature of God, and the dependent nature of man, must have moral agreement and resemblance, in order to constitute happiness. To the exclusion of this, no other basis of happiness is conceivable. That virtue should be the medium of happiness, does not depend on an arbitrary constitution, but on the sufficiency of God and the dependence of man. Consequently, universal Equity *requires*, that he who seeks not his happiness by

conformity to divine rectitude, shall not be happy.

Thus we see that infinite, sovereign benevolence proposes ultimate happiness to a free agent; but it is Equity that *obliges* the agent to seek it in the way of virtue rather than of vice, of rectitude rather than of obliquity, as founded in the nature of things, that is, the nature of God and of the moral subject. Benevolence not only *proposes* to the agent a happy end, but also decretively *appoints* an instinctive propensity after general happiness, and *communicates* assistance to some, and affords the exercise of unrestrained volitions in the choice of good. But Equity requires that this agent shall be free to choose his *own* antecedents;—to choose amiss, if he prefers it, as well as to choose aright; and, in case he adopts those antecedents which are connected, in the nature of things, with loss of happiness, the same perfection of Deity *obliges* him to abide by the disastrous consequence. What spirit *can* be happy without conformity to God? Where there is a radical want of this conformity, there *must* be a change on one side or the other. It *cannot* be on the part of God; consequently a vicious character is *obliged*, in the nature of things,—in eternal truth,—to be miserable. Nor can mere forgiveness alter the

case, but as it is accompanied with a renovation of nature.

These things duly considered, we may perceive the defects and errors of many theories of moral obligation. We may select the following discussion of Archdeacon PALEY as a specimen. Thus, then, he enquires and replies : ‘ *Why am I obliged to keep my word? Because it is right, says one. — Because it is agreeable to the fitness of things, says another. — Because it is conformable to reason and nature, says a third. — Because it is conformable to truth, says a fourth. — Because it promotes the public good, says a fifth. — Because it is required by the will of God, concludes a sixth.*’ Having rejected these solutions as unsatisfactory, how does Dr. PALEY himself answer the question? ‘ *Because I am urged to do so by a violent motive ; (namely, the expectation of being after this life rewarded, if I do, or punished for it, if I do not) resulting from the command of another (namely, of God).*’ But, though this acute writer asserts, that ‘ *this solution goes to the bottom of the subject, as no further question can reasonably be asked,*’ his assertion is not satisfactory. If those answers all leave the matter short, his reply is wide of the mark. With a little reflection, the reader may satisfy himself of the justice of this

remark. According to Dr. PALEY, 'A man is said to be *obliged*, when he is urged by a violent motive, resulting from the command of another.' This definition or explanation applies only to a *sense* of obligation, but leaves the proper ground of it untouched. A *violent motive* is explained to be the *expectation* of being, after this life, rewarded or punished. According to this, if I have 'no expectation,' I have no 'violent motive;' and, if I have not the latter, I am not obliged. But are men *obliged* only according to their EXPECTATIONS of rewards or punishments? To say that this 'results from the command of another,' or 'the will of God,' does not alter the case. For, though this makes the motive to be violent when *perceived*; yet, it shews not the reason *why* the command of another *morally* obliges, whether we perceive its urgent force or not. But this it ought to do, in order to go to 'the bottom of the subject.' And, in fact, thus to confound the perception or sense of obligation with the real ground of it, or, to make the former to stand for the latter, is a very common error in the writings of moral philosophers.

When a person is said to be obliged in honour, in gratitude, in truth, in justice, or in reason, the meaning is, that IF he would be honourable, grateful, true, just, and reasonable,

which are so many consequents, he must choose the antecedents. But, on the contrary, if a person adopt the antecedents of dishonour, ingratitude, falsehood, injustice, or folly, he must abide by the corresponding consequents. We should recollect, that, in these and a thousand more instances, the obligation arises from an existing certain connexion between the means and the end, without any regard to the *virtuous* choice of the agent. For, though the end be good, not in reality, but only in erroneous estimation; still the agent is *obliged* (though not *morally*) to adopt means which are inseparably connected with such an end. For example, a gentleman receives a challenge to fight a duel, for words or conduct which are generally considered by people of fashion as deserving of such resentment. Honour is the *end*, and fighting the *means*; and the existing connexion is rendered certain by custom. He is therefore obliged, in honour, to accept the challenge; that is, if he will retain his character in the fashionable world as a man of honour, he must fight. It would be ridiculous, however, to say, that he is *morally* obliged to fight, or that his virtue and ultimate happiness have an existing certain connexion with his fighting; for this would be most absurdly to identify fashion and morality, and also the standard of the one with that of the other.



The ends, or final objects which free agents may propose to themselves, are as numerous as they choose to make them; and they are left at liberty to adopt what means or antecedents they please, in order to attain them. Here virtue and wisdom, or their contraries, shew themselves. The nature or essential quality of true virtue, as of true wisdom, consists in the choice of one *end* rather than another; and these, in a secondary sense, are of a perfective character where there is a suitable adaptation of means to ends. Persons are 'wise to do evil,' when they have skill in the use of means, while the final object is unworthy. And persons are *essentially* wise and virtuous when their final object is the chief good; but *perfectively* so, when the means employed are worthy of the end. The men of the world are often 'wiser in their generation' than the children of light; for, though the latter choose the more worthy *end*, yet the former generally discover more skill in choosing means conducive to effect their *own* purposes. The reason is, that, in the latter case, the connexion is more obvious between the final object and the means, as founded on the analogies of nature, and subjected to daily observation; but, in the former case, the connexion requires to be 'spiritually discerned.'

No person can be morally obliged to any

act which is inconsistent with pure *virtue*; but to *this*, it is evident, every moral agent is constantly obliged. The ultimate standard of virtue is the divine *rectitude*; to *this*, therefore, we are obliged incessantly to be conformed. The ultimate interest of the moral agent in being virtuous, is final happiness.—Hence we learn, first, that personal happiness is the result, the termination, or the final consequence of virtue; secondly, that divine rectitude is the rule or standard of it; and, finally, that divine Equity is the obliging power, whereby the agent is hypothetically bound to abide by the consequence of his voluntary deviation from that standard,—which is the same as giving him his *due*. Here, it cannot be too earnestly inculcated, that the misery of the wicked is not an arbitrary discipline, a mere voluntary infliction of pain, which a suspension of divine will and chastisement would remove; but what arises from a contrariety of natures, infinite holiness and rectitude in God, and unholiness and perverseness in the creature. And this is perfectly consistent with scriptural threatenings and representations of misery in a future state, which profess not to ascertain the precise cause, but only the terrible effects; and these are the very same, whether we consider them in a popular or philosophical view. Whether the sufferings proceed from the holy and righteous

nature of God, contrasted with the impurity and rebellion of the subject, or from bare will, 'the wicked shall not go unpunished.' The difference, in ascertaining the true *cause* between the two statements, relates to the divine character; which, by the one, appears amiable and glorious, by the other, cruel and forbidding. But no passage of holy writ, fairly represented, will countenance the latter.

VI. It is of interesting moment, in reference to moral science, to have precise ideas of the doctrine of *Motives*. Until, however, we have acquired correct views of the divine character, as equitable and sovereign, and of ourselves as active and passive beings, we are never likely to obtain satisfying evidence on the subject of determining motives. If we make the *whole* of motive to consist in the object contemplated, the same object would affect all minds alike; and, if we allow a difference in the minds affected, the object cannot be the whole of the motive. We are therefore constrained to infer, that the objects, or moral means, which God, as an equitable governor, affords to his accountable subjects, are not efficaciously sufficient. The state of the mind must be taken into the account, for the solution of different results in choosing good and evil.

A difference of mental state, whether by original conformation, or by amelioration, can proceed from no other source than sovereign goodness; but a difference by deterioration, though *occasioned* by the exercise of equity, is not *caused* by it; and much less is it caused by sovereignty. Hence we see, that equity affords objective means as a part of the determining motive; and sovereignty affords that state of mind which ensures a virtuous result; while passive power, equitably suffered to affect the mental state, without the counteracting influence of sovereign aid, becomes a negative cause of a wrong choice. The external part of the motive is the same when presented to different minds; the internal part, which ensures a virtuous choice, can proceed from no other source than God's favour; and the internal part, which ensures a wrong choice, can be nothing but a comparative defect, which may be called metaphysical evil, or passive power, and has no other source than limited existence.

VII. The *origin of moral evil* is a topic of high consideration. While some have contended that we ought to despair, at least in this life, of obtaining clear evidence on the subject; others have boldly affirmed, that moral evil is of positive ordination. This is almost the universal

sentiment of the modern advocates for philosophical necessitation, who reject the Calvinistic system of Theology. They are therefore obliged to infer, that there is no *real* evil in sin; that it is only accidental and relative, after the manner of natural evils. According to them, all the evil is confined to the feeling of the subject, rather than a deviation from essential rectitude; and if the sufferer saw vice and sin as God sees them, he would instantly be happy. If this be not the direct way to obtain a 'seared conscience' and self-complacency in transgression, it is difficult to say where to find one. Is not this giving the lie direct to apostolic testimony, that sin is *exceeding sinful*; and to the general declarations of scripture, that *God hates* all sin, and the workers of iniquity, on sin's account?

But it is grievous that persons, otherwise of sound principles, should be so incautious as to run into this error. The late Dr. HOPKINS of America, bold beyond all the orthodox that ever went before him, though he attempts to guard his assertions against profane consequences, is highly censurable. The tenet itself, that God has *decreed* moral evil, is absolutely indefensible. It is, in fact, to destroy the essence of a moral system. Dr. HOPKINS must have been driven to this false refuge, by the difficulty which his



ardent mind found in accounting for the origin of evil in any other way. But far better would it be to continue in humble ignorance, than thus to charge God foolishly.

If, however, we view a free agent in the light of Equity and Sovereignty, in their exercise respectively towards a moral agent, a creature at once free and necessitated—because a passive recipient of his good, and yet the subject of free will and passive power;—if we view the creature, as indeed he is, absolutely dependent, and in himself an essential contrast to the Creator, in point of independence and all-sufficiency, we shall find a *demonstration* that moral evil cannot proceed from God by any agency or decretive appointment whatever, but from the creature's passive power, influencing, as a negative cause, his free will. Sin therefore must proceed from *ourselves alone*, in the strictest sense. Though placed in circumstances the most advantageous conceivable, by the exercise of that equity which gives to all their due, both as creatures and as accountable, man will shew what he is *in himself*, when not supported by benevolent, sovereign, unmerited influence. And what belongs to man, *because* a free agent, is equally applicable to *all* created free agents, without exception.

VIII. Closely connected with the forementioned subjects, is the difficult problem, how to reconcile the divine *prescience* of moral evil with the *free will* of the agent. Without just views of Equity and Sovereignty, this problem must remain incapable of a satisfactory solution; but in their light, the difficulty vanishes. The good of actions is foreknown, because sovereignly appointed; but the evil of them is foreknown, in their deficient cause, passive power, because that cause is equitably permitted to reveal itself, without sovereign prevention.

IX. Hence we also perceive, by the same light, that the *existence of sin* is perfectly consistent with the *perfections of Deity*. If equity be exercised in the same degree, the free agent shews what he is in himself, both as a creature and as an agent directing his free actions. And, if Sovereign benevolence be exercised towards him, in the same degree will he appear a monument of unmerited favour, promoting his own happiness and the perfection of the universe. The cause of moral evil being strictly in himself alone, as the subject of passive power and free will, his errors are only suffered to take place, without being actively caused by the Deity. They are foreseen as what will result from defect, and not as the

effect of positive appointment. What is good in the act is indeed appointed, but not its failure and criminality.

The agent's obligation is, to intend the ultimate perfection of universal being, to will as God wills, and to act in subserviency to him; but there being in him a cause of failure, when not supported by efficacious, unmerited aid, infinite knowledge must needs foresee it as *certainly* future, and infinite wisdom over-rules it for the highest good. Light and darkness appear intermixed; but the light alone proceeds from God, and the darkness from the creature's passive power. Yet the darkness serves, by all comprehending wisdom and infinite benevolence, to shew forth the greater glory of the light.

THE END.



















